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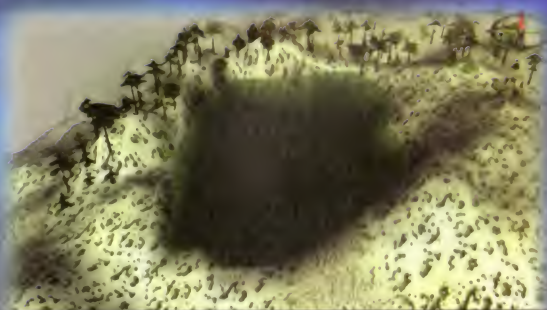


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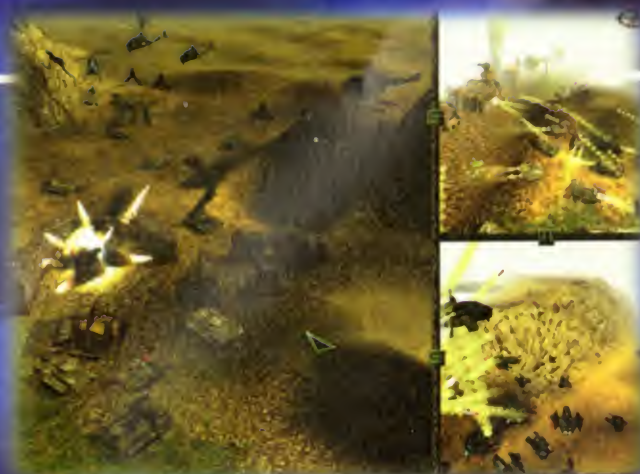
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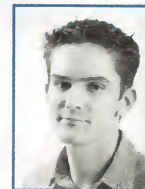
Take a spoonful of sugar from Dr Dan.

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EDITORIAL



Ah, hello. Please, come in... Allow me to get that for you... Take a seat and make yourself comfortable. Later

on I'll give you the guided tour, but first let's get the formalities out of the way.

I'm the new Editor of PC PowerPlay. You might remember me from other job descriptions - News Editor, Staff Writer, Contributor, Chief Lackey, Emaciated Slave (second from the left). Now, finally, after a four year tenure at the house of PCPP. I've made it to the top. It pleases me greatly to know that a stubborn refusal to "get a real job" is a prerequisite sufficient for promotion. But anyway...

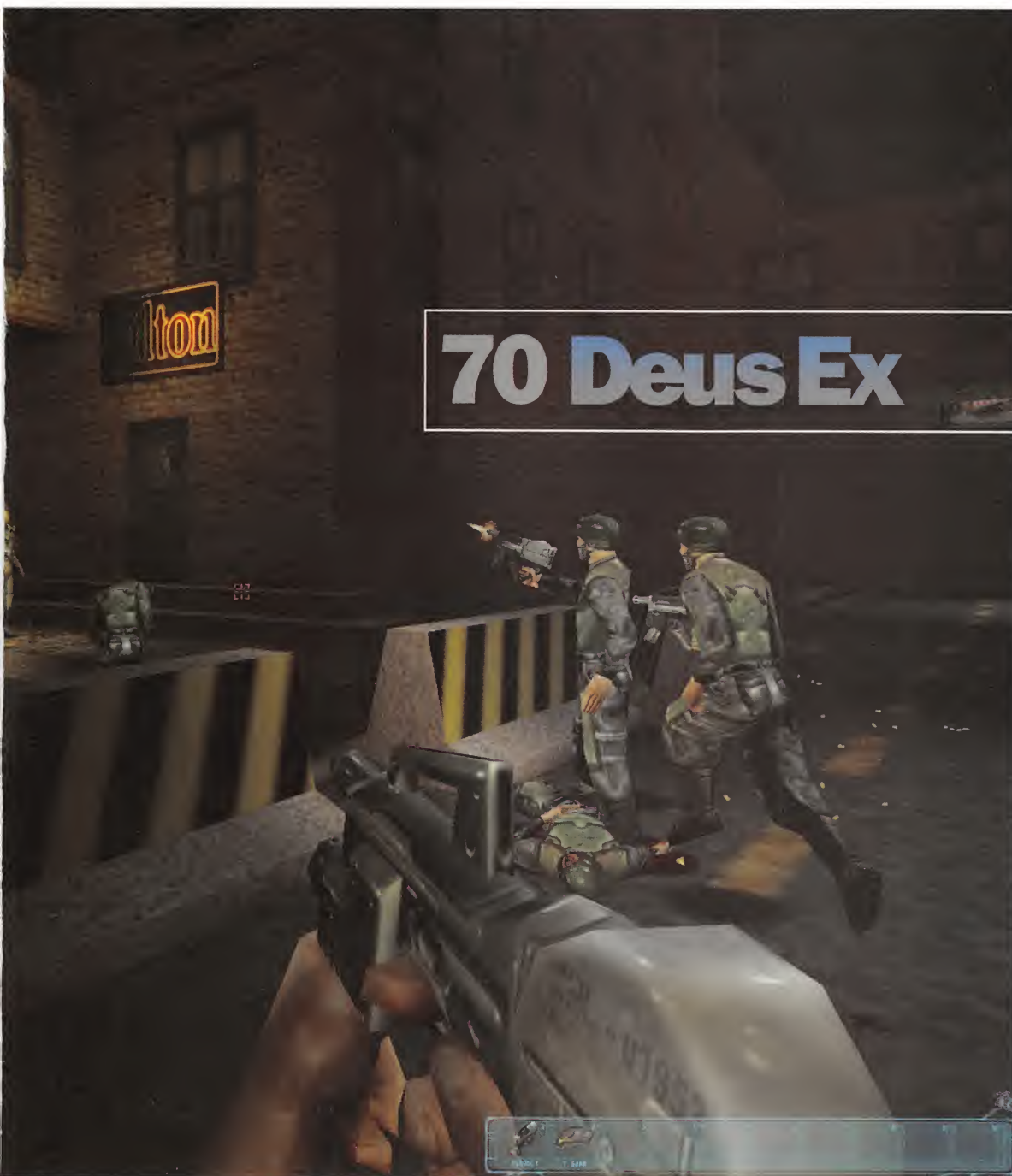
Team PCPP has a plan for the future of this magazine. In general terms, the coming months will bear witness to a slight shift in emphasis, some design changes - both major and minor - as well as a stack of new sections. We believe that gamers like yourselves demand in-depth information and analysis, so we're committed to bringing you regular interviews with the guys and girls who are creating the most exciting and important games ahead. To kick this off we've hand-picked what we believe to be the ten most promising games in development - you can discover the Future of Games from p34.

It's our goal to present you each month with the best games magazine on the planet. Already I think this is the finest edition of PCPP in its fifty-odd issue history. I asked March whether he agreed, and he returned with his customary reply: "Aye."

You don't have to take our word for it, though. Write to us and let us know how we're doing, what you don't like and what you'd like to see more of. But, please, read the rest of the issue first...

David Wildgoose,
Editor

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FIRST
LOOK

Blair Witch

FIRST
LOOK

New Legends

FIRST
LOOK

Sydney 2000



Spotlight

GAME NEWS AND VIEWS



This year's Electronic Entertainment Expo has come and gone in a blaze of neon lights, polygons and poor sods dressed up as game characters. With an estimated 2000 games on display and an attendance of over 50,000 people across the three days, E3 2000 is easily the largest and most important games show on the calendar. The entire games industry - developers, publishers, retailers and journalists alike - descended upon the Los Angeles Convention Center from May 11-13. PC PowerPlay's representatives flashed their bright red media badges at the scary security people at the door and stepped inside.

Despite the predominance of the PlayStation 2 - many of its games were being unveiled for the first time - the PC managed to more than hold its own with quality titles in all corners of the show's vast floor space. Although a lack of new game announcements kept surprises to a bare minimum, the opportunity to experience firsthand some of the year's biggest titles proved irresistible.



(above) The queues were bigger than at a Grace Bros post-Xmas sale.
(left) E3 is big - very big. This is just one of the lobbies to the three main halls.

THE BIGGEST GAMES SHOW ON EARTH

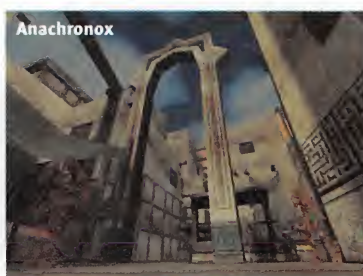
PCPP TAKES A TOUR ROUND THE THREE-RINGED CIRCUS THAT IS **E3 2000**.



All the major PC players had strong line-ups. Eidos, Havas, Microsoft and Interplay were especially impressive, each boasting not only several stunning games, but a depth in quality that augurs well for the year ahead.

Taking command

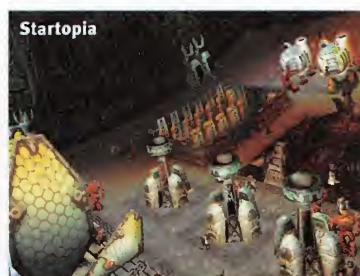
Highlight of the Eidos stand was a 99.9% complete version of **Deus Ex** (see p68). Producer Warren Spector charmed everyone with his passion for the game and, more importantly, the handing out of free UNATCO t-shirts. We're wearing ours as we write. Elsewhere, **Hitman** (see p58), **I'm Going In** (formerly known as Project IG1), **Anachronox**, **Startopia**, and even the **Sydney Olympics 2000** game, all looked



promising. Elixir Studios' ambitious **Republic** was shown in demo form only behind closed doors. It still has a long way to go, but designer Demis Hassabis (who cofounded Lionhead with Peter Molyneux) is clearly a frighteningly talented guy.

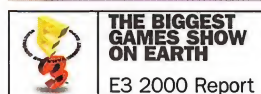
However, it was a little known Spanish development team called Pyro Studios whose game drew the heaviest attention. **Commandos 2** just keeps getting better each time we see it, and this was no exception. The game's Project Leader, the brilliantly named Gonzo Suarez, was on hand to talk PCPP's representative through its paces. Check p48 for the full mission briefing.

Over at the Havas stand, Blizzard was content to tease with a modest section devoted to the still



unfinished **Diablo 2**. Next to it - and, it must be said, hosting twice as many eager onlookers - was the first public airing of a playable **Warcraft 3** (see p60). The recent





design changes seem set to deliver a more familiar RTS experience, yet crucially a better designed and balanced game. While there was no word regarding **Half-Life 2** (all our enquiries were met with either feigned ignorance or a blunt no comment), a bunch of seriously good Half-Life mods did their best to fill the void. Disappointment at the news that both **Team Fortress 2** and **Tribes 2** seem likely to slip into the new year was alleviated somewhat by the appearance of **Empire Earth**. Age of Empires designer Rick Goodman's epic - there is no other word for it - take on the RTS genre is equal parts Civilization and Age of Kings. And all

with a proper 3D engine, too. In a word: deep.

X marks the spot

Featuring perhaps the biggest prop of the show - a video room in the shape of a giant 'X' - Microsoft had a perpetual line of people wrapped around the perimeter of the stand waiting for a glimpse of the power of X. Sadly, slightly enhanced versions of the recent GDC demos were on show and not much else. A point made clear by the X-Box MIB and just about every developer out there: it's a console system, not a PC. Time will tell which direction developers will take with it after the development kits are sent out in July.



The PC games on display were of a consistently high standard. Chris Roberts had actual gameplay to show of **Freelancer**. Don't dally - go to p40 right now. For a sneak preview: stunning. After redefining realtime strategy with Total Annihilation, Gas Powered Games' Chris Taylor showed us what can be done with a fresh perspective on the age-old dungeon hack with **Dungeon Siege** (see

GAME CHAT

DAVE PERRY
Shiny

What does E3 mean to you?
E3 is the most important game show of the year. It's vital because all the world's press come and take the time to see all the important titles of the show. This is the show that we've waited for, and the anticipation - "Are people going to like what we've done?" - is really exciting.

What trends have you noticed this year?

The games are very typical - lots of sports and driving games. That's not the stuff Shiny likes to do, we like to redefine ourselves every single game. The games I like are those where people are trying something new.

Which games have impressed you the most?

I love Halo - it's different and very cool. Metal Gear Solid 2 is trying to mix genres and become almost a movie-game, because it's not just an action game - it's getting quite epic in a movie sense.

FIRST LOOK!

Fallout Tactics

- Genre: Tactical Combat
- Developer: Microforte
- Due: Late 2000

Developed locally by Canberra-based Microforte, this is the latest in Interplay's acclaimed Fallout franchise. It's not, however, a true sequel or third iteration in the roleplaying series. Rather the emphasis is on small-scale, squad-based combat. Microforte has taken the basic Fallout combat mechanics - and tweaked them to include a swag of new options and a highly playable "continuous turn-based" mode.



FIRST LOOK!

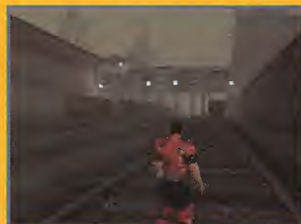


New Legends

• Genre: Action • Developer: Infinite Machine • Due: TBA

Though announced during E3, this thirdperson action game from Jedi Knight designer Justin Chin was actually unveiled away from the main Convention Center. Before leaving to set up his own studio, Infinite Machine, Chin found fame at LucasArts where he was the lead designer on Jedi Knight. New Legends takes its cue from the memorable thirdperson light sabre duels of the Dark Forces sequel, choosing to concentrate its gameplay around melee combat. The game is set in ancient China and will build significantly upon its Unreal engine foundation. How ironic, though, that it bears more than a passing resemblance to LucasArts' own Obi-wan.

Chin's pedigree should ensure New Legends lives up to its name.



p54). According to its number one fan Bruce Shelley, **Crimson Skies** "is putting the fun back into flight sims", and absolutely looked the part. Shelley's own Age of Kings expansion, "**The Conquerors**", turns up the fun factor in his acclaimed RTS with a host of tweaked, new and extra bits. The same can be said for **MechWarrior** (the IV appendage has been discarded) - fans will be delighted with the direction FASA's Jordan Weisman is taking the series.

Brief stops at **MechCommander 2**, **Combat Flight Sim 2**, **Conquest**, and **Metal Gear Solid PC** proved that there is freedom to choose with quality games. And the mysterious "behind-closed-doors-only-thank-you" **Sigma** confounded



those lucky enough to bear witness.

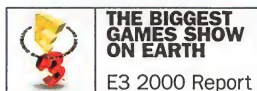
On the hardware front, Microsoft gave us the **Sidewinder Force Feedback Mk 2** (a much more aesthetically pleasing tool), the **Strategic Commander** (a mouse-like game controller designed primarily for strategy players, which actually works!), and the **Game Voice** (a real-time voice software/hardware combo for



multiplayer gamers).

Weirdly wonderful

Away from the main hall's overwhelming volume, Interplay's stand provided some much-needed refuge. How convenient, then, that it just happened to house some of the show's best games as well. The long-delayed **Giants** was there (again!) to show off its breathtaking visual



E3 2000 Report

GAME CHAT

GONZO SUAREZ
Pyro Studios

What does E3 mean to you?

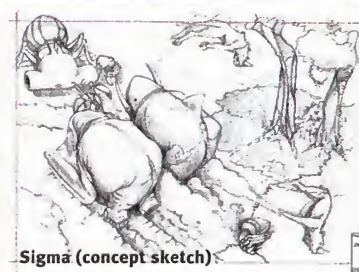
To us it's a place where we can show our games to the world market. It's very difficult being based in Spain to get word out about our games.

What trends have you noticed this year?

Most companies have less money this year and that has seen the acceleration of the production of their games, so there are only two or three notable titles on display. The rest have been rushed to make financial deadlines.

Which games have impressed you the most?

There are two or three very good games - Munch's Oddysee, Metal Gear Solid 2 and Warcraft 3. Blizzard has built up a trust that they will finish their games properly, and not rush them.



Sigma (concept sketch)

FIRST LOOK!



Our hero's unwavering resolve kept the menacing wall at bay.



Blair Witch

• Genre: Action/Adventure • Developer: Terminal Reality • Due: 3rd Qtr 2000

The first of the proposed trilogy of games based on The Blair Witch Project is already well into development. Created by Terminal Reality, it uses technology built for the team's earlier action/adventure, Nocturne. It should come as no surprise to learn that all three titles - the second is by Rune designers Human Head, while Sin creators Ritual are responsible for third - bear a strong resemblance to that venerable classic of survival horror, Alone in the Dark, which was also on display at the show.



Starship Troopers



Kiss: Psycho Circus



Rune



Neverwinter Nights



THE BIGGEST
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ON EARTH
E3 2000 Report

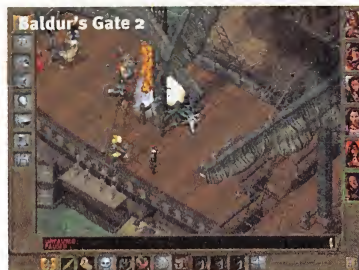
GAME CHAT

ROB PARDO
Blizzard

What does E3 mean to you? It's a really good test to see where our game is compared to what everyone else is doing at the time. It's a lot of work. We have to get the game ready for E3 as well as trying to get it ready for release.

What trends have you noticed this year? None really. It used to be that companies would try to be the biggest and loudest, but the last couple of E3s have started to calm down. We're not really interested in topping each other now. Which games have impressed you the most? The Metal Gear Solid 2 demo looks pretty exciting. And I got to see Peter Molyneux demonstrate Black & White, which looks very innovative. It's too bad that a lot of the games I'm interested in looking at are behind closed doors. It's not like we're gonna steal ideas!

panache and utterly unique gameplay. Judging from our brief (way too brief) play time, we think it will be worth the wait. The Black Isle triumvirate of **Baldur's Gate 2**, **Neverwinter Nights** and **Fallout Tactics** presented themselves with enhancements, innovation and a new direction, respectively. Of particular interest, we can now reveal that Canberra-based developer Microforte has been handed the task of recreating Fallout as a tactical combat game similar to X-Com. Another developer turning its hand at something different was Shiny. The spectacular spell effects and surreal rolling landscape of **Sacrifice** (see p56) immediately marked it down as



a contender for the best-looking game of the show. Its skewed take on the typical realtime strategy formula appeared to be paying dividends as well, with its pace by turns strategic, tactical and fantastically frenetic.

Further afield still, Gathering of Developers had set up their marquee in a parking lot across the street from



the Convention Center. Whether this was an act of independence - a defiant finger to the corporate masses inside - or some organisational bungling is something we'll leave for you to decide. Nonetheless, **Max Payne's** post-Matrix stylings left more than a few jaws to be collected from the floor. Couple that with the likes of **Rune** and **Kiss: Psycho Circus**, and action freaks had their bloodthirsty desires well and truly satiated.

Alien alert

When it was time to head back into the main pavilion, the last place we wanted to be was the Electronic Arts stand. Jackhammers perforating your eardrums wouldn't make quite as much noise as the huge video screens and accompanying giant speakers that EA had erected for our "pleasure". Thankfully, then, we were able to adjourn to the private booths upstairs to witness gems such as **Black & White** (p36), **Simsville**, **Ultima Online 2** and **Alice**. Back on the floor itself, there were glimpses to be had of **The World Is**



GAME CHAT

RICK GOODMAN
Stainless Steel Studios

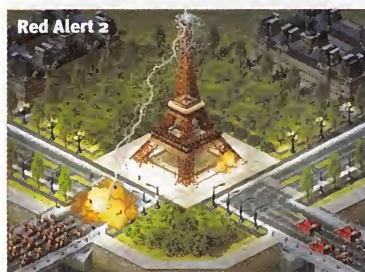
What does E3 mean to you? It's really important to the team. They've been working for two years and they've never had any outside feedback that what they're doing is going to ever amount to anything. This is our first opportunity to hear someone else say, "Hey, that's neat." I've been to E3 many more times than I've been to Disneyland.

What trends have you noticed this year?

I look at strategy games, and I do like the traditional RTS. Most strategy games at the show, though, are going in a more tactical route. There are fewer games that are comparable to what we're doing. As a developer I'm happy with that, but as a gamer I'm not.

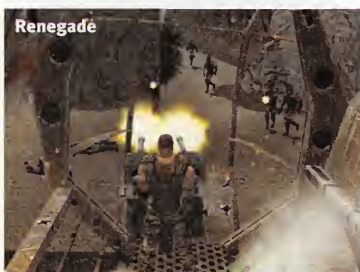
Which games have impressed you the most?

I continue to be impressed by Black & White. Peter should take his time and make it the perfect game. Of interest recently, the team is excited about Sacrifice. From what I've seen it looks very impressive.



Not Enough (looking unsurprisingly like Goldeneye - but on the PC) and the new Command & Conquer titles, **Red Alert 2** and **Renegade**. The former will no doubt please fans of the series, while the latter is, well, still a long way from release.

Nearly tired of assuring fans and newcomers alike that **X-Com**



Alliance is NOT a basic firstperson shooter, Microprose stood proudly next to the little silver men with big beady eyes standing equally proudly next to their game. Boldly attempting a seamless merger of the classic squad-based tactical gameplay with a firstperson spin, **Alliance** proves to be more enticing each time we see it

(see p52). The **B-17 II: The Mighty Eighth** demo showed that this flight sim/RPG is coming along splendidly, whilst **Starship Troopers** added to the list of squad-based games at E3 2000. This home-grown (Blue Tongue, Melbourne) title's movie license almost seems an afterthought (even then the game features a strong pledge to the particulars of the novel) with gameplay getting the required attention. With weather effects in full force (oh my, the reflections!) to silence the doubting Thomases, **Grand Prix 3** attracted many an interested attendee. Unsurprisingly, Geoff Crammond's sequel to the best Formula 1 game of all time proved an absolute crowd pleaser, with many stealing precious



THE BIGGEST GAMES SHOW ON EARTH

E3 2000 Report

FIRST LOOK!

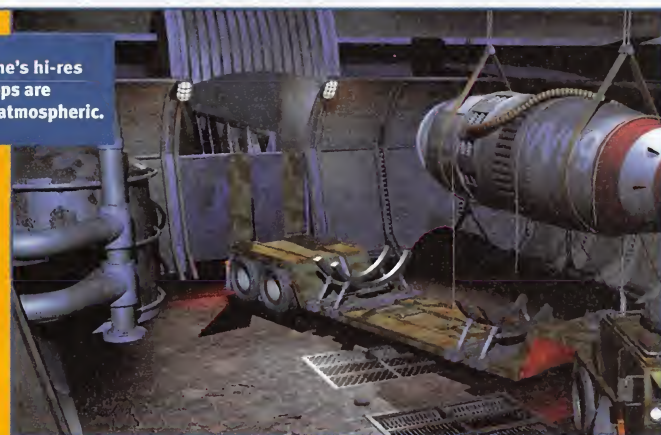
In Cold Blood

• Genre: Adventure • Developer: Revolution • Due: 4th Qtr 2000

Adventure gaming isn't dead, it's just taken a back seat to the many action/adventures out there. In **In Cold Blood**, then, is the beloved adventure game with the odd action sequence thrown in. Not at the expense of narrative, however.

Beginning two thirds into the story, **In Cold Blood** has the player backtrack into the recent past to discover your present, and future, direction. Adventure game of the show, and from the respected creator of the Broken Sword series.

The game's hi-res backdrops are hugely atmospheric.



FIRST LOOK!

Star Trek
Bridge Commander

• Genre: Space Combat • Developer: Totally Games • Due: Late 2001

Little is known about the specifics of this ambitious title, save that Larry Holland's Totally Games will bring the same attention to detail and authenticity

paramount in their Star Wars combat games to the Star Trek universe.

Players will have the pleasure of commanding starships straight from the captain's chair, just like it was done in the movies. Based upon what we saw, expect a highly tactical Starship simulation with a gripping storyline to boot.



GAME CHAT

BRUCE
SHELLEY
Ensemble
Studios

What does E3 mean to you?

We're always happy to have the opportunity to talk to people in the industry. Not only do we get to talk about the game we create, but who we are. It gives people a chance to talk to the people who create the game about their game, instead of someone in PR. As long as my voice holds out, I'll talk to anybody. We also get to do a lot of discovery here. We get to see all the other development products (well, a lot of them anyway) - I like that, because we borrow from the things we like.

What trends have you noticed this year?

I'm interested in B&W for sure. I've seen Peter demonstrate it three times, so I feel I could do the demo myself. It looks beautiful, it's got a lot of great ideas, I'm just waiting to play it. I want to see what Blizzard are doing. I have a lot of respect for what they do. Ground Control, Sudden Strike - I wanna see that. Dungeon Siege. I think Chris is a great designer.

Which games have impressed you the most?

Empire Earth - it's very ambitious.

playtime attempting to better their previous lap times. The less said of PCPP's own efforts, the better.

Beam us up!

Return to Castle Wolfenstein was the undisputed crowd-magnet in Activision-land. Showing a couple of

playable levels, Gray Matter's action/adventure nostalgia trip wouldn't have been the same without the strangely alluring wartime mistresses brandishing knee-high black boots guarding the stand. Our steely resolve melted at the sight of their hard leather whips. Nearby, id's

modest **Quake 3 Team Arena** stand drew the faithful - and more than one comment about its "likeness to the Unreal Tournament style" was heard. The many queries regarding id's next full title were either clumsily dodged or flatly ignored.

Elsewhere, the Activision stand was Star Trek paradise, with four promising titles on their way.

Voyager: Elite Force lays to rest all the concerns of both firstperson action gamers and Trek fans: it will slice. **Away Team** (bearing an unofficial kinship with Fallout Tactics) puts the tactical strategy of Jagged Alliance into the Star Trek universe, and looked surprisingly enjoyable.

Conquest Online, in all of its spreadsheety depth, intimidated all but the hardcore ST enthusiast. And finally, Totally Games' **Bridge Commander** was present in desperately early form. Under Larry Holland (X-Wing series), BC looks set to take Star Trek space combat where it's never been before. **Tony Hawk's** second skating sojourn proved a bruising alternative to Trek related material, as did the RPG **Wizards and Warriors**.

Tired and emotional

By late on the third day, when your correspondents were staggering around in a barely conscious daze, it suddenly hit home just how damn big E3 really is. Having summoned up the energy for one last tour of the





Halo



Escape from Monkey Island

main hall in case anything important had been missed, we encountered a final few delights.

Now under the Ubisoft umbrella, Revolution's Charles Cecil was showing off his latest adventure game (**In Cold Blood**) on the show floor, and waxed lyrical of his efforts post-Broken Sword. Bungie teased us with video footage only of **Oni**'s gameplay, whilst their opus' showing - **Halo** - was gloriously disappointing. Played at a small booth entrancing a HUGE line of interested gamers, we were treated to more footage of what appeared to be a fully-rendered representation of the gameplay. We're sure there's a game under there somewhere...

LucasArts, again choosing seclusion behind closed doors, proved that the next Monkey Island and Jedi Knight games actually do exist. **Escape From Monkey Island** looked gorgeous in 3D, but it was the news that the writers of Sam & Max are reprising their roles with Monkey 4 that pleased us most. **Obi Wan**, on the other hand, elicited a mixed reaction. In response to the queries regarding the thirdperson perspective, easy - it's to make epic light sabre battles possible. The catch - nary an epic light sabre battle was to be seen at this stage of the game's development. Fans will do well to remember also that graphics were never the series' strong point.

No One Lives Forever was the highlight of Fox Interactive's display, its echoes of James Bond were unmistakable despite the fact that the main character is female. Epic's Mark Rein was demoing to anyone dropping by the private Infogrames booths the technology to be used in the next iterations of **Unreal** (which will consolidate the game's split into single and multiplayer franchises). Needless to say, it looked hugely impressive, and will allow the team to create expansive outdoor environments. With closing time upon us, we were just about to challenge him to a game of Quake 3 before those scary looking security people returned to haul us away...



THE BIGGEST GAMES SHOW ON EARTH
E3 2000 Report

GAME CHAT

CHRIS ROBERTS
Digital Anvil

What does E3 mean to you?
I would rather not do E3. It's difficult to stand out in the noise here - and you can't show *that* much of the games you're demonstrating. I'd rather have the press come to us and have a longer look at my game. And it seems most people want to show more of the Gee-Whiz stuff rather than actual gameplay and game mechanics - so what's it all about, you know?

What trends have you noticed this year?

It seems less important nowadays than it used to. In the old days distribution used to be a lot more fragmented, so E3 was really to show buyers the games. It was great, because the press would also come. But now, there's a very small number of buyers, who buy much larger quantities - so performing for them is not as important anymore. It then just becomes a great big show - and it just seems like you could do better targeted coverage.

Which games have impressed you the most?

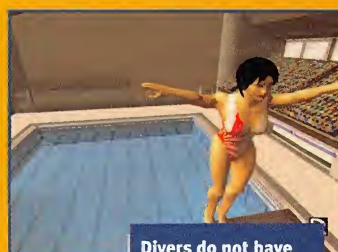
I would have said Black & White, but I saw that again at the recent GDC. I really want to check out Giants. If Halo's on the show floor - I also want to check that out.

FIRST LOOK!

Sydney 2000 Olympic Games

● Genre: Sports ● Developer: Eidos
● Due: August 2000

Olympic Games games have a long history of being, well... crap. Eidos looks set to change all that with Sydney 2000. They've added much-needed depth to the single player game, with a host of training sessions, career modes, and lead-up events to be negotiated before you even reach Homebush Stadium. The real fun of any Track & Field style game, however, is in multiplayer - something that hasn't been overlooked here either. You can daisy-chain keyboards or take your trained athletes online.



Divers do not have chests that large. But weightlifters do.



Racing is in your blood

Actual game footage



***Along with small pieces of
rock and bone.***



Satisfy your craving for dirt-bike action, head-numbing crashes and outrageous stunts on over 40 tracks in 6 events including Stunt Quarry, Nationals, Baja, Enduro, Supercross and Multi-player Tag, and get that blood of yours pumping. Download the free trial version of Motocross Madness 2 at www.microsoft.com/games/motocross2



Microsoft

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ONLINE GAMING

EVERYONE SAYS THE **INTERNET** IS THE REAL FUTURE OF GAMING. BUT HOW CAN YOU GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR ONLINE EXPERIENCE? WELL, YOU CAN JUST TURN THE PAGE, ACTUALLY...

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Choose life. But which one?

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What does the future hold?



INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER GUIDE

WITH NEARLY ONE THOUSAND ISPS IN THE MARKETPLACE, CHOOSING THE RIGHT ONE CAN BE A DAUNTING TASK. **SEB FERN** SORTS THE WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF.

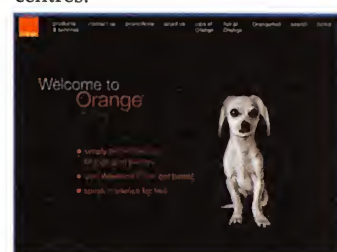
*****To connect to the internet you first need a modem. Then you need an Internet Service Provider (or ISP). It's a fact of life. And for the immediate future, unless you're a metropolitan resident who's fairly well off, your only option is a humble dial-up connection.

The Basics

For starters, don't even consider an ISP that doesn't have 56k connections. All of the ISPs in this roundup have V.90 connections and this is what you should look for if you need or decide to go outside the scope of this review. It may seem obvious, (or unnecessary for those in capital cities) but make sure that the ISP you decide on has a Point of Presence (POP) in your local call area. Even with the reduced price of STD calls these days, you can still get burnt when you receive your phone bill if you connect to an ISP that's out of your local area.

This comparison covers several major national ISPs. While it would be fantastic to have a comprehensive ISP comparison of all Australian ISPs, there are currently almost 1000 ISPs in Australia - testing all of them would be grounds for an entire book, not a magazine article. Also, the market is far from stagnant and performance of individual providers is constantly changing.

The ISPs we've chosen for review are the main contenders in the home market; they all have POPs in capital cities and most of them also have POPs in regional centres.



THE CONTENDERS

AAPT Smartchat Internet	http://www.smartchat.net.au
AOL	http://www.aol.com.au
Compuserve Pacific	http://www.compuserve.com.au
Dialix	http://www.dialix.com.au
dingo blue	http://www.dingoblue.com.au
ihug	http://www.ihug.com.au
Lexicon	http://www.lexicon.net
Netspace	http://www.netspace.com.au
One.Net	http://www.one.net.au
Optus Internet	http://www.optusnet.com.au
Orange	http://www.orange.net.au
OzEmail	http://www.ozemail.com.au
Pacific Internet	http://www.pacific.com.au
Planet Internet	http://www.planet.com.au
Telstra Big Pond	http://www.bigpond.com
TPG	http://www.tpg.com.au

Price

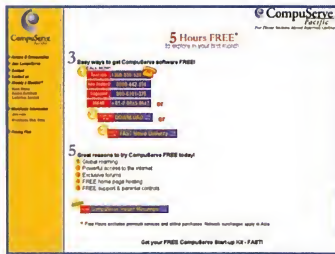
Price is a very personal thing and even if you can afford the best, you still want to pay the lowest possible price for it. With connection to the net, as in life, you usually get what you pay for. For a lower fee, a provider is usually cutting something out of what's offered in a seemingly identical plan. That's not to say that you can't find a legitimate bargain, or conversely, an ISP who's overcharging. Ultimately, shop around, and know exactly what you're getting for the cash you sacrifice each month. Prices and plans change very often, so keep your eye on the ball. Ultimately: read the fine print.

Fortunately, prices have fallen in the ISP market. Most ISPs

now offer a high usage or unlimited plan. Only Dingo Blue and I-hug offer truly unlimited plans, having no time or download limits. Most other ISPs offer either a large number of hours (between 150 and 250) with unlimited downloads or unlimited connection time with a cap on the number of megabytes that can be downloaded per month (between 150 and 300MB). TPG also has a curious but enticing plan known as the Nightrider Pack, which offers completely free access with no download limits between the hours of 1am and 8am.

If you've got the money to put towards some kind of unlimited plan, our recommendation is either a completely unlimited plan or one with limited hours





rather than downloads. To put it in perspective, 150 hours in a 31-day month is just under 5 hours a day; 250 hours per month is a smidge over 8 hours each day. Conversely, 300MB in the same month is just under 10MB per day. When you're fraggin' the enemy, downloading software and being part of a 'music community', 10 megs goes very, very quickly. And beyond eight hours a day? Come, on - you'd have to be an unemployed insomniac to require any more (no offence is meant to unemployed insomniacs).

Each ISP also has various other plans catering for different usage levels and cost requirements. The hourly cost for all other plans (except those with very few hours intended mainly for email) tends to fall around \$2.50 per hour on the high end of the scale. This is a far cry from two years ago when \$2.50 an hour was the absolute cheapest price you could pay for access. If you're looking for value in the mid-range around \$1.00 per hour should be the sweet spot.

Another new development in ISP pricing structure is the phenomenon of pricing 'bundles'. Optus Internet, Orange and dingo blue offer discount-rate plans to their existing phone (and pay TV in Optus' case) customers. The discount can be

very attractive - Dingo Blue offers its completely unlimited service to local-call or long-distance customers for just \$25. The same service will cost those with other teleco's \$45. At \$25, it may well be worth choosing Dingo Blue for your long-distance calls.

Connection speed

You want the fastest downloads, and you want to be able to squeeze every last drop of speed out of your modem. Connection speed is important, but when it comes to the crunch, you should be far more interested in HTTP and FTP transfer speeds. The rate of your download has a lot more to do with the backbone your ISP uses to connect to the world than whether your modem connects at 48 or 44kbps.

Telstra on both its regular and Big 150 networks shows that it has the muscle to handle it all, performing consistently both locally and to the US on both transfer protocols. Other consistently high performers are Lexicon, Netspace and Dialix. Pacific is one of the fastest to the US via FTP but is let down by slower Australian downloads. OzEmail, Optus and dingo blue come in next best with good averages.

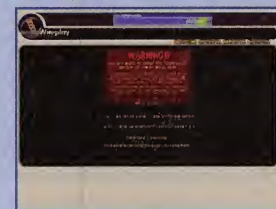
AOL is dismally slow via HTTP, only beaten to the wooden



GAME SERVICES

There's only so much an ISP can do for game performance, most of them cater mainly for the general web-browsing populace. Before you stop eating and go for cable there is one other option - dedicated game services. These services are designed for gaming and nothing else. Through dedicated networks they increase performance. Their main aim is to minimise latency - the most important game performance bottleneck. There are two main types of game services: those that have a separate dial-up account and those that work in conjunction with your existing provider.

Wireplay



Wireplay has established itself as Australia's premiere dial-up gaming service. It promises lower latency and higher speed due to a dedicated network. Wireplay offers three connection options, all using Telstra Bigpond's network: Wireplay Warp for

Telstra's cable customers, Wireplay Direct - a direct dial-up connection to Wireplay, and Wireplay Power for existing Bigpond customers. Wireplay performs to its reputation, managing even better ping times and lower packet-loss than Telstra's connection to other Australian servers. Wireplay uses its own client software so the work of finding servers is all but eliminated. Charges range from \$9.95 for 10 hours to \$20 for unlimited monthly dial-up access. Unless you're totally happy with your current dial-up game experience give Wireplay a try.

Multiplay

Multiplay is arguably more popular than Wireplay, the chief difference being that Multiplay does not offer the ISP-like feature of dial-up access. This service offers dedicated high-speed connections for games of up to 32 players. Multiplay promises essentially the same thing as Wireplay - better gaming through lower latency and better game network performance. Multiplay performed very well, trailing Wireplay by negligible figures. Multiplay's client software is more extensive but also larger and more resource-hungry than its main competitor's. Prices range from \$5 an hour to \$29.95 for unlimited access. Multiplay offers a free 'trial' service - check it out and you may just become hooked.

The Future

Many ISP have indicated that they intend to launch a gaming service sometime soon. ihug is on the verge of starting up theirs with very promising looking specifications. This service will be competing with Wireplay, Multiplay and others but will be introduced under a different business model. Soon, as broadband becomes the norm, more and more ISP's will provide game services and they are likely to be included in the price of your access plan. Of course you don't need a game service to play online. Many games include their own server browser and programs like Gamespy of Kali allow you to find just about anyone you could ever want to challenge.

ISP GUIDE

Here are just some of the basics to look for when shopping for an ISP:

- Make sure the ISP has V.90 connections (all in this roundup do).
- A Point Of Presence (POP) in your local call area is essential.
- Unlimited plans offer the best value, the next best option is a high usage account (150 hours +) with unlimited downloads.
- Download speed is more important than connection speed.
- The ping or latency is the chief performance indicator for online gaming. Remember, the lower the ping, the better your gaming will be.
- An ISP may perform very well but if you can't connect or if the line constantly drops out, you'll never get to enjoy that performance.
- Watch out for technical support charges, your ISP should really supply free tech support.

The top performers in this roundup were all very close in real world terms and the ISP market is becoming very competitive. This means that whatever choice you make, chances are that it's going to be a good one.

The screenshot shows the Lexicon website with a navigation bar at the top. The main content area features several links and promotional banners, including one for 'Fastest Australian Downloads' and another for 'Fastest US HTTP Downloads'.

The screenshot shows the Optus website with a navigation bar at the top. The main content area features several links and promotional banners, including one for 'Optus Internet Zone' and another for 'Optus Mobile Offers'.

The screenshot shows the Yes! Optus website with a navigation bar at the top. The main content area features several links and promotional banners, including one for 'Optus Internet Zone' and another for 'Optus Mobile Offers'.

spoon by Compuserve. AOL can hardly connect to a local FTP server, with near total FTP connect fails. Its speed is actually above average to the States, but this is hardly saving grace. Compuserve has proven itself slow and unreliable locally; overseas it's just slow. TPG, like Telstra and OzEmail has two networks (one main connection and a high usage network), unfortunately this separation did nothing to improve TPG's performance. Finally, ihug also struggled in transfer testing.

Ping Is King

When it comes to online gaming, especially with First Person Shooters and Action games, latency is the most

The screenshot shows the Digital Camera website with a navigation bar at the top. The main content area features several links and promotional banners, including one for 'Digital Camera' and another for 'Digital Camera'.

The screenshot shows the Dingo Blue website with a navigation bar at the top. The main content area features several links and promotional banners, including one for 'Dingo Blue' and another for 'Dingo Blue'.

important measure of performance. The lower your ping the more responsive the game feels and the better you'll play. A high ping can reduce you from champion of your online domain to new paint on the walls. Unless you have a really good reason for playing overseas you should find a local server. The reasons are rather obvious degradation of quality over distance applies to the internet, and this is this Gameplay will be more enjoyable and there's no shortage of gamers or challenge in this country. There's a little more to latency than just the ping figure in milliseconds; you also have to account for the number of packets that are lost while connected. If this is too high, a great ping is useless because

you're not getting enough information from the game server. Thus a delicate balance is struck between ping and packet loss.

Telstra is actually slightly bettered by Netspace and Lexicon in raw ping times. Due to their higher packet loss, however, Telstra's main network comes out on top. AAPT has excellent ping times but due to excessive packet loss it is not an option for gaming. The next best option is dingo blue with excellent ping and very acceptable packet loss. Slightly faster than dingo blue, is Telstra's Big 150 network but its higher (though still satisfactory) packet loss relegates it to fifth place.

AAPT, One.Net and both OzEmail's networks have excellent ping times but are not viable options for gaming due to unacceptable packet loss. If for some reason you're not interested in the top five but still wish to play online games, Optus, Pacific Internet and Orange are your final options respectively. It should be noted that Optus and Pacific have the lowest ping loss of the round up equal with Telstra's main network.

Reliability

An ISP can have brilliant performance but if you can't connect then you're never going to see that performance. This is the unfortunate truth about Lexicon and Netspace. With around 15% failed connections

TYPICAL INTERNET USAGE

- 1 hour web surfing (10 sites visited): 1 - 3MB
- Latest game patch download: 33MB
- 2 hours playing Team Fortress 2: 2 - 3MB
- 1 hour playing Quake 3 Arena deathmatch: 3 - 4MB
- Download 3 mp3 files: 10 - 15MB
- 5 email messages including a Word attachment and an animation: 500KB - 1MB
- Latest antivirus update: 1 - 2MB
- Preview movie of the next must-have game: 30 - 60MB

Most ISPs charge only for downloads, so any information uploaded is 'free' on a download-limited plan. This is the general trend but not always the case, check with the ISP first if in doubt.

[illegible]

Owning the network helps Telstra sweep the field. Unfortunately the Big150 doesn't perform quite as well as the main network; the performance hit is slight, though and for the current price of \$35, this plan is very hard to beat. If you can handle your modem beeping at you, Netspace's Saver 200 plan offers exceptional performance once you have actually connected. At \$45, it's a little expensive but you get over an hour more access time per day than with Telstra. Lexicon doesn't offer an unlimited download plan but if you're not sure you will use their 300MB per month each and every month



for just \$25. This represents incredible value - a high performance ISP, very suited to gamers, for 3c an hour - peanuts.

- Most reliable service.
- Practically the fastest.
- Performs well in all areas, beaten only in some by Telstra's main network.
- Provides unlimited downloads.
- Good value.





THE FUTURE OF ONLINE ACTION

IT'S TIME FOR THE TRANSITION TO TEAMPLAY. **ELIH BRADING** OFFERS AN ANALYTICAL APPROACH TO THE CURRENT CROP OF COOPERATIVE COMMANDOS.



*The days of deathmatch were once a vivid and fruitful era, full of adept and spirited gamers who fondly frolicked amongst a storm of rockets and a shower of gibbs. Ah, those were the times, eh? When a player didn't care for anyone but themselves, where the "shoot everything that moves" principle still applied, and where "control the red armour and camp on the rocket launcher" were your main objectives. We've got news for cataleptic gamers like yourselves: it's time to put down the railgun and be rid of the redeemer, for teamplay is here and it's firmly entrenched amongst a prolific online world.

Get in position and wait for my go

The number of players walking the evolutionary trail towards teamplay is truly phenomenal. Gamers from the days of classic Quake are flocking towards Quake3;

Fortress, Team Fortress Classic and, of course, the exponentially popular Counterstrike. Perhaps it's a fad that will pass within the next year or two, with gamers making the transition back towards the more traditional art form. Who knows? Who can predict? For the time being however, the doggedness of teamplay looks promising, with a host of impressive titles scheduled for immediate release and in the near future.

True teamplay games such as Team Fortress 2, Tribes 2, Halo and the community-created Half-Life modification Counterstrike V1 are on the horizon, and any of the four look to be the greatest temptation ever for a firstperson gamer. True teamplay games invoke team values: working in squads to fulfil designated game objectives as opposed to working in squads purely for the kill. While Capture The Flag was perhaps the first true

disciple of teamplay, present games and present gamers are looking for more than just playing patriot. They need to be rewarded for working in teams, for fulfilling objectives in addition to displaying individual efforts. People want a game where although honed deathmatching skills play an integral part in success, they are little when

weighted against basic team dexterity.

Get out of there, it's gonna blow!

The accessibility of the net has made online gaming a feasible option for the masses. People use the internet not only as a tool for research, but as a point of contact

MUST, HAVE, T-T-TEEEAMPLAY!

YOU'VE GOT THE BUG, WHERE'S THE DOCTOR?

Although many of the games already have built-in server search engines, they never are, or will be as comprehensive as Gamespy. Gamespy isn't just the game server specialist, it's a humble hospital for almost every firstperson shooter yet created: Quake, UT, Half-Life, SOF, Rogue Spear, Tribes and modified versions of all these games are supported. Download and install the program, then update the server lists for the games you play and you'll be entering an amazing world of rabid proliferation.

<http://www.gamespy.com/>



Halo

and an epicentre for entertainment. The anonymity is opening up, and users are becoming much more personal - especially with their gaming.

Teamplay games offer an unparalleled level of playability and replayability. Squad-based, human AI offers a different online experience almost every time.

Leading your teammates in against an educated enemy is a daunting task. You can nominate success or deem failure - it really is a rational experience, often times you'll care for the (virtual) lives of each individual member.

If you haven't given teamplay a glance, you really don't know what you're missing. It's at the peak of firstperson ecstasy and an online experience like no other.

Taking fire, need assistance!

The current trend of teamplay leans towards that of realism. Made popular mainly by the Counterstrike mod, it's accessible to new gamers because they are instantly familiar with the settings and environmental entities. Counterstrike puts players into the role of terrorism and counter-terrorism, an area in real

life that is much publicised and well covered by the media, and a faction instantly recognisable by people who don't even understand the concept of "keyboard." Most people know what an assault rifle does and will understand what a bullet could do to them.

Influenced by the ideals and evidence from the community, Valve (the creator of Half-Life) is developing

Team Fortress 2, a title that promises to create conceivable environments within a game that rewards players for positive team-based tactics. Continuing on with the class-based system, players will be benefited by working in packs. This is especially so due to the inclusion of the much-publicised commander class - a member who will boost team moral and the abilities of the pack under his supervision.

Team! Fall back

Not only will it be making gameplay advances, the TF2 team is shaping some industry leading technologies. MRM (Multi-Resolution Mesh) technology and voice communication will have a major effect on the game: players will be able to speak to each other in realtime, and MRM will allow for

ADDED INFLUENCES

THE TEAM-TAMED ASPECTS OF THE PRE-PRODUCED SHOOTER...

DELTA FORCE 2



If you're into simulated warfare, DF2 replicates real-world combat situations with real-life weaponry. It has a cluster of multiplayer modes from CTF through to King of the Hill, where delegating your teammates across detailed terrain becomes an integral part of squad success. Taking into account environmental effects,

such as wind and elevation, is imperative for shot accuracy and strategic advantage.

<http://www.novalogic.com/>

QUAKE III ARENA Team Arena



Under development by id software themselves, Quake 3: Team Arena promises to add what was sorely lacking in the original: a strong team-based element of play. Although it remains to be seen whether or not id will incorporate the class-based system

(heavy, medium, light) that was suggested for the original release, the promised intensive modes of play are likely to push Q3:TA above everything else in its league. Though, perhaps their efforts would be better left to focus on their next DOOM project...

Jailbreak



Whilst essentially a conversion from the original version, JB for Quake3 is still a blast! Like many mods, JB consists of two teams and two bases, but the differences are deepened through the concept of prison escape. Killing an opponent automatically

places he or she in your jail - their only way of escape is through their release by a fellow friend. Invading the opposition's base and pressing a button or trigger will release your teammates. If all players on one team are killed (thus imprisoned), success goes to the team that captured all opponents.

http://www.planetquake.com/quake3/missionpack/preview_a.shtml



ADDED INFLUENCES

THE TEAM-TAMED ASPECTS OF THE PRE-PRODUCED SHOOTER...

HALF-LIFE

Team Fortress Classic



Developed officially by the company, TFC is a free add-on created to build upon the fundamentals fabricated by the game's original multiplayer component, and to enhance the team-based, multiplayer aspects of this strong singleplayer title.

Pitting two teams against each other, success in TFC is heavily weighted upon the appropriate balance of the mods classes.

<http://www.planetfortress.com/>

Counterstrike v6.5 beta



What can be said about what is perhaps the most popular mod in existence? Although the original Team Fortress has more games to its name, the flocking popularity of the Half-Life mod has showed that many gamers are growing tired of the stock shoot 'em up.

The number of players that have made the transition to Counterstrike is phenomenal; it's almost impossible to find a server that isn't jam-packed with the most hardcore of devotees, even on quiet weeknights.

Counterstrike puts you in the realistic role of either a terrorist or counter-terrorist. Although each mission varies in both layout and objectives, there are four basic modes: assassination, escape, hostage rescue and defusion. If you're yet to play it, you're really missing out. Even the most hardcore of deathmatch fans will find it testing to abstain from conversion, as CS is both exceptionally compulsive and gratifying. And now that the CS team has both the financial and technical support from Valve itself, things can only get better from here.

<http://www.counter-strike.net/>

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

Assault Mode



Unreal's Assault mode is perhaps the first true derivative of Capture The Flag released by an in-house development team. A true-teamplay transition from the original tournament, Assault plays absolutely superbly and was one of the major selling points of

the game for Epic. It involves two teams - one defending, one attempting to fulfil designated level objectives: from destroying the bridge of a ship to derailing a train. Assault remains an excellent addition to the genre.

<http://www.planetunreal.com/>



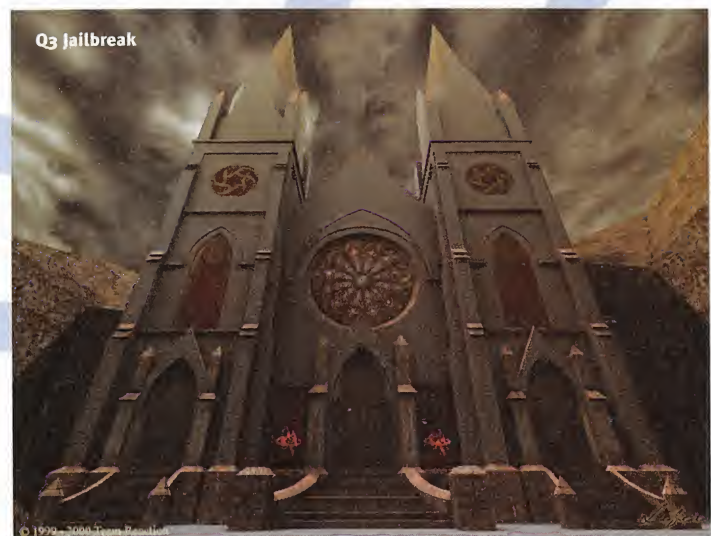
support for scalable models that will allow for playability with even up to 32 players.

Though TF2 has some major developments, the fact remains that it's still being developed under the Quake2 engine and will surely look dated by next year - especially when other teamplay games, namely Halo, hit the shelves. The engine developed by Bungie looks to be utterly amazing; the technology video shown of the game has many in the industry talking, despite the fact that no-one is yet to see anything solid in terms of gameplay merit (though it does seem to have a relatively solid storyline).

Halo is set within a large outdoor vista, similar to that of Tribes 2. Players run over rolling hills and will be able to see each other across outdoor expanses. Not

only will players be able to run in packs, but player operated vehicles will play an integral part in team success. In both Tribes 2 and Halo, gamers will be wise to team together so that they can open up and exploit the full advantages of vehicle-mounted weaponry.

Teamplay has an unquestionably promising future. For the majority, the excitement generated from cooperative play is unmatched yet by any deathmatch or singleplayer firstperson experience. Predominantly due to the binding quality of the game, but also to the quality and variety of opponent tactics, team games will be well followed and well supported. The wave is powerful and unstoppable: join a server, join together - you'll have the time of your life.



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NEW



SS-100
Protect a system against accidental power On/Off & Reset by installing an intelligent electronic security guard. Changeable PIN prevents unauthorised access to your data. Built-in timer allows variable operation time. A timer countdown can be set to turn off your PC.

NEW



NB-600
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FA-100 FAN ALARM

FEATURES & BENEFIT

- Almighty protection to your computer system through FA-100 Buzzer sound and pilot indication.
- Coolers failure or mal-function will be detected.
- Built in outlets will allow you to use 3 pin or 4 pin plug.
- Easy installation and system cooling is fully guaranteed.
- Reset switch serves as silencer to user before replacement.



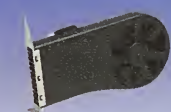
HD-600

New Design for HARD DISK

- Extend HARD DISK life and reliability.
- **ANTI-DUST** and simple installation.
- Airflow : 18CFM



System Fan



FC-900L
• Extra long duct mainboard internal cooler



ST-900
• Mainboard cooling kit fit into a 3.5" bay



FC-500PS
• FC-500 With installation adaptor.
• Fits for print port and slot.



FC-100
• Dimension: 120×90×27mm
• Airflow:32 CFM
• Voltage:12V
• System cooler for Pentium II & A.G.P. Card



FC-200
• Dimension: 108×90×27mm
• Airflow:32 CFM
• Voltage:12V
• System cooler for server, raid, Industrial computer (on SCSI port)

TT-900 Twin Turbo:

FEATURE & BENEFITS

- Dual 9CM Fans / 80CFM
- Fits any 5.25" Bay
- High Performance and Low noise
- Easy Installation



Monitor Cooler



MC-100

NoteBook Cooler

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P-02SII
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P-03A for Pentium II & Athlon/K7



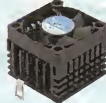
P-200
for Pentium & K6



P-22SII (Dual Fans)
For SECCII & Pentium III



P-22A (Dual Fans)
For Pentium II & Athlon/K7



P-500
For Socket 7, Socket 370 300Mhz and up



P-32SII (Three Fans)
For SECCII & Pentium III



P-05A (Three Fans)
For Pentium II & Athlon/K7



P-600 (6cm Fan)
For Socket 7, Socket 370 500Mhz and up



P-02C
For celeron



P-22C (Dual Fans)
For celeron



CH-410
For AGP Card, Voodoo Card.



CH-420
For AGP Card, Voodoo Card.



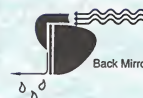
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SF-800 (80×80×25mm)
SF-801(3 wire) (80×80×25mm)
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IT'S A BIG, BIG WORLD

LIVE YOUR LIFE IN A MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER VIRTUAL REALITY. IT'S CLOSER THAN YOU THINK, WRITES **BRETT ROBINSON**.



***** When Origin first announced the impending planned development of Ultima Online, many perceived it as the coming of the ultimate in PC gaming. Here, at last, was a game you could - literally - devote your life to. It promised a persistent virtual world, populated by thousands of people from across the world, in which you could do anything you wanted. Whether you wished to live the life of a brave adventurer or establish your own baking business - the choice was yours.

But its premature release prompted those who purchased it to complain that they were, in effect, unpaid beta testers of a

game so buggy as to be almost unplayable. Countless other problems like rampant player-killing and the unscrupulous exploitation of bugs saw many players opting not to renew their accounts after the free trial period. And so the gaming population became somewhat disenchanted with the concept of Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs).

Our saving grace arrived in the form of Verant's Everquest: a game that is superior to UO, and so addictive that many have dubbed it 'Evercrack'.

This was followed several months later by Microsoft's equally addictive game, Asheron's Call. Unfortunately, our enjoyment of these games has been marred by the fact that, as a direct

consequence of our small population, our country is bereft of dedicated servers. The crippling lag experienced by those with the patience to play on US servers has stifled the popularity of such games here in Australia. But a local developer intent on catering to both markets may yet rectify this sad state of affairs.

Immersion

At the forefront of MMOG development is the Sydney office of Canberra-based studio, MicroForte. Their current project, codenamed BigWorld, is based on cutting edge technology that will support anywhere between 100 and 10,000 players per server. Although it will contain some roleplaying elements, BigWorld will be geared towards the action end of the gameplay spectrum. This will effectively differentiate the game

from established titles like Everquest and Asheron's Call, and shift the game's emphasis from statistics to player immersion.

How immersive this world really is will hinge on a number of factors, not the least of which is the game's engaging backstory. The inhabitants of BigWorld are prisoners sentenced to a lifetime of servitude on a desolate and remote planet. Prior to their arrival on the planet, each prisoner's mind was erased to minimise their potential for conflict. Conflict wasn't completely averted, however, and a riot saw the 'wardens' flee the planet, leaving the prisoners to their own devices. Each player will create their own character, who will start the game with no recollection of their past - a clean slate if you will. Every player's actions within BigWorld will be dictated by their motivations and

HISTORY LESSON

Massively Multiplayer Roleplaying Games aren't a new phenomenon at all, with a long history in the form of MUDs, or Multi-User Dungeon games. These were almost always exclusively text-only games, requiring complex strings of text commands to play.

More than three years ago we saw the first generation of MMORPGs, with Meridian 59, Dark Sun Online and Sierra's The Realm. With overly simple graphics and gameplay mechanics, these died quickly, and paved the way to the more successful second generation of MMORPG.

These three games represent the current crop of persistent online roleplaying. They each appeal to a different type of player - ranging from the overly social to the exceptionally visceral. Each requires an active ISP to log onto their game servers, and each charges an additional subscription fee. This stands at US\$10 a month.

Also, these online worlds are constantly changing. With frequent patch and feature upgrades and implementation, the MMORPGs are evolving at a rapid rate. Check with their respective websites for the latest news.

Ultima Online



www.ultimaonline.com

UO was the first of the second generation MMORPGs, and is still going strong. Based on the infamous Ultima series of RPGs, UO is similarly set in Britannia and used a whole slew of familiar characters and locations. UO is more of a social RPG, where player

interaction - in the form of guilds, alliances and politicking - is heavily encouraged. A thirdperson isometric view is used, in keeping with the style of the series.

EverQuest



www.everquest.com

Verant's EverQuest is the 3D action answer to Ultima Online. Using a 3D engine and a firstperson perspective (an over-the-shoulder thirdperson perspective is also present), EverQuest is a much more visually exciting game than UO. A particular favourite is the city

amongst the trees. EQ employs a far more effective combat engine, and thus players which are more combat oriented tend to play EQ.

Asheron's Call



www.asheronscall.com

AC arrived after both UO and EQ, so it's not surprising that it falls somewhere in between the two in regards to gameplay. Using a firstperson 3D engine, Asheron's Call combines frantic combat with a good guild and alliance system. It also holds mass player events (run by the

game masters) on regular occasions to engage its inhabitants. AC is also quite plot heavy.

aspirations, but many will seek to fulfil an underlying desire to discover their identity.

Future stories

The decision to set BigWorld in a futuristic era - as opposed to the quasi medieval time periods of existing games - permits a much greater flexibility in designing the game. "It allows us to create a different kind of setting, and to give the universe a very different feel," explains Steve Wang, Vice President of MicroForte and Producer of BigWorld. "Fantasy games tend to have a very strong focus on magic, while the futuristic setting shifts attention to technology. In fact, our scenario allows us to solve many of the classic problems of interactive storytelling.

"In BigWorld, your story

begins straight after the erasure of your mind. You cannot injure people in certain areas because a chip in your head disables violent instincts. Upon dying, you get resurrected because the system believes you are a prisoner and wants you to serve your entire sentence. All of these things make in-game activities out of those things that, in other games, require you to step outside of the world and suspend your disbelief."

Seamless service

Numerous technical innovations will see BigWorld surpass its competitors in the performance stakes. Current server systems assign specific regions of each game world to individual servers. This system works admirably when players remain evenly distributed

throughout the various regions, but latency problems arise when large numbers of players congregate in a single region. MicroForte have addressed this issue with a system that divides the workload evenly between servers. In this way, acceptable performance is maintained even when thousands of players gather in a specific region, and regions aren't rendered inaccessible in the event of a single server failure. A unique 'ghosting' technique ensures that transitions between regions are seamless, and a new smoothing method makes it possible for thousands of players to appear on screen simultaneously. According to the company, even players with 56K modems won't notice an appreciable difference in the game's fluidity under these conditions.

For those intrigued by the prospects of playing a game like BigWorld, there is a down side: the game is due for release in late 2001. But it seems the wait will certainly be worth it, and an Australian stress test of the game later in the development cycle will tide many over until then. But for the time being, it is possible to follow the progress of the BigWorld project on MicroForte's web site at www.microforte.com.au.





MODEM BUYER'S GUIDE

SEBASTIAN FERN LENDS SOME CONSUMERLY ADVICE

***** Whether you live in the battle arena, feel like the web is an extension of your nervous system, or know your friends exclusively by their ICQ nicknames, chances are that a modem is what connects you to the rest of the world. While the sun may be setting on the analogue modem's reign, broadband connectivity must prove its affordability and availability before it can seize the modem's crown. Regardless of whether you're buying your first modem, finally replacing your 14.4k dinosaur or the dodgy nameless box that came with your rig which has decided that spontaneous combustion is not just for humans, the modem is going to be one of the most cost-effective internet connectivity solutions for some time yet.

Abbreviations 101

The speed of an analogue modem connection is measured in kilobits per second, or kbps - commonly further abbreviated to k. This is only worth noting because most of the data your PC handles, such as the amount of space on your hard drive or how much RAM you have is measured in bytes (and hence kilobytes, megabytes and gigabytes). A byte is exactly 8 bits in size. Thus a 56k modem (which, incidentally, has a rated download speed of 56.6kbps but will only transmit at 33.6kbps upstream) will only have a theoretical maximum download speed of approximately 6.9KB/s. Notice the capital letters in the last figure? Good, 'cause chances are that your browser measures the download speed in KB/s

(that's kilobytes per second for those at the back of the class). Now it should be clear that even though downloading seems to take forever, your new modem isn't performing at less than a tenth of its rated speed!

Speed

The only modem speed worth considering is 56k. After modem manufacturers upped the ante from a maximum speed of 33.6k to 56k, there was a bit of a problem: there were two separate and incompatible standards - US Robotics X2 and Rockwell K56flex. Since February 1998, the ITU (International Telecommunications Union) V.90 standard has existed - all new modems should be based upon it. Be aware, though, that the other standards exist, so check the packaging and/or manual to make sure that what you're getting is the genuine article. Some manufacturers may still be offering X2 or K56flex modems that are flash upgradeable to V.90 for

discounted prices. Doing so is fine - just make sure that you won't be charged anything for the upgrade. If in doubt, buy a genuine V.90 modem and save yourself the abusive phone calls to tech support.

Connection

There are a number of ways a modem can interface with your system - you have to decide which connection is right for you. Basically your new modem is going to be either internal or external. Internal modems require more hardware knowledge to install and you have to rely on software to let you know that they're functioning correctly. On the other hand they're cheaper, take up no desk real estate and don't add to the cable jungle behind your desk. Although you can still buy both PCI and ISA internal modems, don't waste your time with ISA. It's only a matter of time before ISA slots disappear from PCs altogether and finding an ISA modem that is truly plug-

and-play compatible and functional is more of an art form than anything else.

External modems are typically easier to install than their internal cousins; they have status lights on the front panel so you can see exactly what's going on and they are easily portable between systems. Traditionally they've also come with large, heavy power bricks - and this is still the case with serial port modems. USB modems, however, are powered by the USB port itself and also tend to come in smaller housings. At no extra cost to the consumer, and as most operating systems and new PCs become USB enabled, USB modems promise to usurp the popularity of serial modems.

Whether your choice is PCI, serial or USB, make sure that your chosen device supports the operating system(s) you intend to use with it. Windows 2000 still has issues with some modems (mostly USB); Linux may also need a development kernel to be used for some

THE FIRST DEDICATED GAMING MODEM

3Com has come up with the first (and still only) modem marketed specifically for gamers. This piece of hardware promises to reduce your ping by up to 43%. So what's the catch? Your ISP has to use 3Com modems as well. Given that, by nature, an analogue connection is unpredictable, 3Com has tweaked the firmware of its already very good V.90 modems and included drivers that allow you to choose to connect in 'gaming mode' which reduces the connection speed to provide a more reliable connection. The lower connection speed has almost no impact on

multiplayer games, but it does allow for increased reliability - essential for reducing ping and a godsend if you suffer from dropouts in the heat of battle. The Internet Gaming Modem works very well in its element but is slightly slower than other hardware modems in terms of raw net connection speed. If your ISP uses 3Com hardware and you're willing to fork over the extra cash for the best ping from an analogue modem - go for it. Just don't whinge when a 10 year old with cable wipes the floor with you (again).

modems or it may not want to communicate at all with them.

Software - not all fun and games

So you've decided between PCI and USB for your gaming über-rig, then just before you purchase the last analogue modem you're ever likely to buy, you see a shiny new 56k Winmodem for a less than \$50. It's 56k, an absolute steal and you run some flavour of Windows - so it's a great option, right? Wrong. So-called Winmodems are software-driven; this tends to lead to slow connections, random disconnection and slow connect speeds - if they work at



The NetComm Roadster II: it comes thoroughly recommended.

all. Recently, however, (internal) software modems have improved. You can get a reasonably fast connection with a software modem but the reliability of the connection will never be quite as good as a controller-based

(hardware) modem. So, yes, you can get a reasonable software modem that may cater to the average PC user's needs, but do you really want your processor doing the modem's work when you're in a full deathmatch level and every CPU cycle counts?

End game

If you don't play online games that rely heavily on ping times, a good quality software modem can do the trick in today's systems (300MHz and above). If you're only going to surf the web then the same applies. For the rest of you: steer clear of these devices and go for the something like the 3Com Gaming Modem or NetComm's venerable Roadster II instead.

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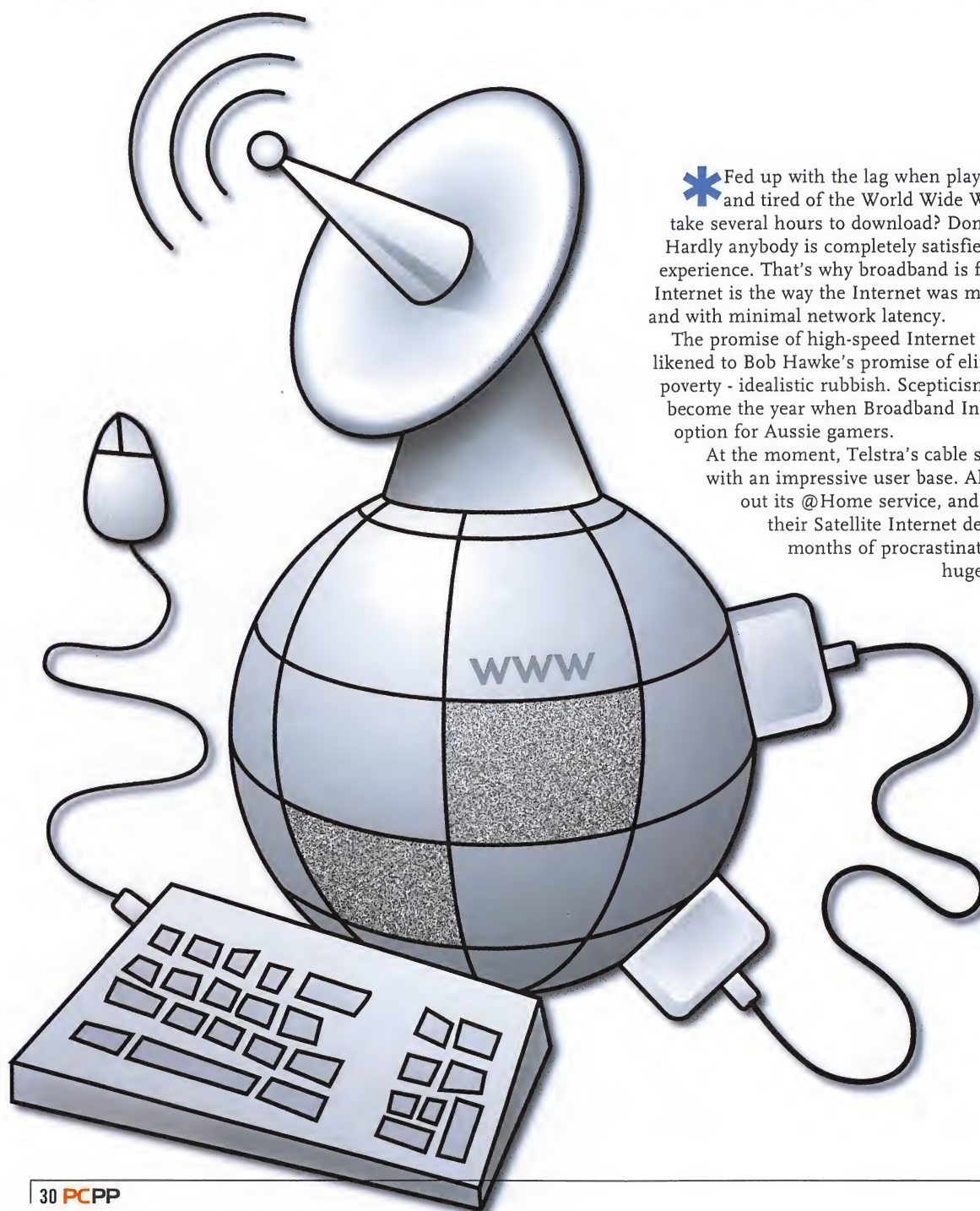
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CABLE AND BEYOND...

HUGH NORTON-SMITH EXAMINES THE FUTURE OF ONLINE GAMING TECHNOLOGY



*****Fed up with the lag when playing Quake? Finally sick and tired of the World Wide Wait? Vexed by demos that take several hours to download? Don't worry, you're not alone. Hardly anybody is completely satisfied with his or her Internet experience. That's why broadband is for you. Broadband Internet is the way the Internet was meant to be - lightning fast, and with minimal network latency.

The promise of high-speed Internet for home users has been likened to Bob Hawke's promise of eliminating Australian poverty - idealistic rubbish. Scepticism aside, 2000 looks set to become the year when Broadband Internet becomes a viable option for Aussie gamers.

At the moment, Telstra's cable service is leading the way with an impressive user base. Also, Optus is busy rolling out its @Home service, and Austar/Chello are making their Satellite Internet debut. And finally, after months of procrastination, ADSL is set for a

huge release, with almost every Australian Telco getting involved in some capacity.

So which broadband option - Cable, ADSL, Satellite or Microwave - is best for the ultra competitive online gamer? Read on.

BROADBAND SPEED COMPARISON

CONNECTION TYPE	THROUGHPUT	DOWNLOAD SPEED
14.4K Modem	14,400 Baud = 14.4Kbits	1.8Kbytes/Sec
28.8K Modem	28,800 Baud = 28.8Kbits	3.6Kbytes/Sec
33.6K Modem	33,600 Baud = 33.6Kbits	4.2Kbytes/Sec
56K Modem*	56,000 Baud = 56Kbits	7.0Kbytes/Sec
ISDN Single	64,000 Baud = 64Kbits	8.0Kbytes/Sec
ISDN Dual	128,000 Baud = 128Kbits	16Kbytes/Sec
Cable Modem	From 128Kbits to 3+Mbits	16Kbytes/Sec to 375+Kbytes/Sec
xDSL	From 128Kbits to 3+Mbits	16Kbytes/Sec to 375+Kbytes/Sec
DS3	45+Mbits	5.6+Mbytes/Sec

*N.B. Due to line conditions, a 56K V.90 analogue modem is highly unlikely to connect at full speed. In some areas, a regular, high-quality 56k Modem will only achieve a 26,400 Baud connection, regardless of the ISP being used.

*Please note that the speeds listed are purely theoretical.

TECH ANALYSIS

ISDN

Integrated Services Digital Network or ISDN utilises similar technology to a conventional analogue modem. Like a standard modem, it is a dial-up service based on the copper telephone network. However, it requires a special digital modem to interface the ISDN network. Dual ISDN has proven to be very popular with businesses that cannot afford a full T1 connection. Ultimately, it's very dated technology, at a prohibitively expensive price. Avoid.

Satellite

Also known as DTH, Satellite is becoming increasingly popular amongst the rural and regional populace. It involves transmitting a signal up to the satellite and then beaming it over a wide area - or a 'footprint'. A small satellite dish (varying from 0.65m to 1.2m diameter) is required to receive the signal in the home. Satellite Internet provides extensive coverage and, therefore, access to households that would otherwise be unserviceable by cable technologies due to their low density and remote locations. A satellite connection offers similar performance to a cable modem, in places where the rolling out of fibre-optics is too costly.

Sounds peachy? There are several major problems with

Satellite Internet, however. At the moment, it is a one-way service: Although all downloads are handled via the satellite downlink, uploads must be made by a conventional 56K modem. This seriously limits the overall speed of the connection.

The inherent lag - the time it takes commands and data to travel to and from the satellite - is another problem. Requesting information via a 56K modem, and having the reply beamed down from a satellite in GEO orbit introduces severe latency. Essentially, this translates into VERY high Quake ping times. If you're into online Chess, this shouldn't be a problem. But if you demand lightning-quick responsiveness, avoid. Sadly, nobody can fix long ping times due to geographic distance.

It's also a costly solution, especially in light of what you get; although a satellite dish looks damn cool (CIA outpost or NASA space station, anyone?), the cost of purchasing all the equipment, including the decoder box and specialised Ethernet card, is insanely expensive. Also, throw in the cost of installation, and it's considerably more expensive than any of the other broadband options.

Cable

Cable involves the laying of lines

- either underground or overhead - which connect into individual homes. Since cable uses a dedicated pipe, you don't have to bother with a phone line ever again. No need to dial-in, no busy signals and no unexpected disconnects; in fact, you can remain almost permanently connected. It's also blazingly fast: Although the current generation of cable connections is lucky to push 3Mbits, analysts predict that line improvements could yield speeds above 30Mbits. That's a mind-boggling 500 times faster than a 56K modem. In comparison, a T1 connection (what we use at work) is limited to a paltry (!) 1.5Mbits.

It's an appealing concept, but like every other broadband solution, it has its share of problems. Primarily, cable modems are a shared pipe. You must share the available bandwidth within your street or building with any number of hardcore net surfers. Naturally, this includes the usual assortment of Quake server operators, warez doodz, avid Porn aficionados and Napster nutters. Ergo, your download speeds can fluctuate enormously due to high demand. In a worst-case scenario, it can be almost as bad as an analogue modem. Depressingly, this is likely to get much worse, as more netizens move from 56k to Cable.

Cable is currently offered through the Telstra BigPond Direct and Optus @Home services.

Hardcore gamers will want to stick to the unlimited downloads option. We're converts.

xDSL

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has recently recognised Telstra's monopoly over the Australian broadband market. Not only has Telstra been forced to grant full local loop access to its competitors (Optus, One.Tel), but they are being asked to start the mainstream rollout of ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line) networking by August at the latest.

Perhaps the most hyped development in broadband connection, ADSL allows customers most of the advantages of a cable modem whilst using a humble telephone line for connection. In addition, ADSL lets you talk down the line while still connected! As the name implies, ADSL is a purely digital standard, and is thus essentially the technological successor to ISDN. Like Cable, however, you will need to invest in a specialised (and expensive) modem to use ADSL.

ADSL offers a theoretical high speed of 3Mbit, although Telstra is expected to launch the relatively unproven Australian service at a significantly lower speed. It isn't anywhere near as fast as a Cable connection, but developments in the core technology should yield significant performance improvements.

Microwave

Microwave Internet utilises the radio frequency spectrum to transmit a data stream to households with line-of-sight to the transmitter tower. This is usually a 50km radius. A Microwave connection requires a large aerial to be able to access these signals. At the moment, the Microwave service is limited to 2Mbit/sec. This service is only offered to Austar customers.

Other Technologies

The delivery of Broadband Internet is constantly evolving. Although we expect most people to be using ADSL or Cable for the





next five years, there are some other promising developments waiting in the eaves.

Fibre-Optic cabling has the potential to transmit far more data than conventional coaxial cable. As the name suggests, fibre optics involves the optical, rather than electrical, transmission of data. Although some aspects of the Internet already use fibre optics, the backbone of the service is still reliant upon 1960s era copper technology. Plans are afoot, thankfully, to replace this aging equipment with all-optical technology. While it's currently limited to major American Universities, the Internet2 is a purely fibre-optic system. Internet2 was put online during February 1998, and allows for previously

unheard of speed. It removes most of the bottlenecks characteristic of the current Internet. Ultimately, similar technology could generate a virtual revolution in Internet usage.

Another proposal, ventured by British company Nortel, involves sending data via standard electrical wires. It's an intriguing concept, particularly as it relies on the ubiquitous power grid. It would allow almost any household to utilise the Internet at an attractively low price. Sadly, it's still largely at a conceptual level, and limited to speeds equivalent to an analogue modem.

Other rather outlandish ideas range from using huge blimps floating 20KM above cities, to a proposed Laser connection.

HOTLINKS

www.chello.com



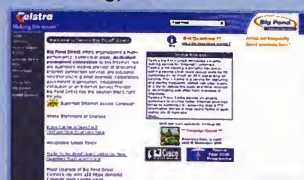
www.austar.com.au

Satellite Internet via Austar



www.direct.bigpond.com

Telstra Bigpond Direct



www.optushome.com.au/

Optus@Home Cable



GLOSSARY

Broadband: A rather nebulous and overused term, broadband refers to high capacity data transmission. Broadband is assumed to be significantly faster than a conventional analogue modem.

Dial-Up: Pertains to a system whereby a user must use a standard telephone line to connect to their ISP. Generally, dial-up has a limited connection duration. The alternative to Dial-Up is a dedicated connection, such as Cable.

Ethernet: A widely used local area network technology. Ethernet comes in both 10Mbit and 100Mbit flavours. A Network Interface Card is required to access an Ethernet network.

Fibre-Optics: Refers to the medium of transmitting data as light impulses along a glass or plastic wire or 'fibre'. Although they are very expensive to install, optical lines carry far more data than conventional alternatives.

FTP: File Transfer Protocol. The simplest way (in terms of

technology required) to exchange files between computers on the Internet. Often used for file downloads.

HTTP: Hypertext Transfer Protocol. The set of rules for exchanging displayable web pages and related files on the World Wide Web.

ISP: Internet Service Provider. A company that provides people with access to the internet through dial-up or some other connection.

kbps (k): kilobits per second. The usual measure of the speed of a networked connection including all types of Internet connection.

KB/s: KiloBytes per second. Also a measure of network speed but used for downloads rather than connection speed. Thus KB/s measures the 'real world' performance of a connection.

Latency: Basically a synonym for delay, an expression of how much time it takes for a packet of data to get from one designated point to another.

Modem:

Modulator/Demodulator. A device that modulates outgoing digital signals from a computer to analogue signals for a copper telephone line, and demodulates the incoming analogue signal into a digital signal. In sum, a modem is the most popular interface for connecting a computer to an ISP.

Packet: The smallest unit of data routed between two points on the internet. When any file is sent from one place to another via the internet it is divided by the TCP layer of TCP/IP into efficiently sized pieces (packets), these packets are separately numbered and each contain the internet address of the destination. Each packet may travel different routes through the Internet; when all the packets have arrived, they are reassembled into the original file.

Ping: A network-debugging tool, that allows users to find the latency in any system. Basically, it sends a short data burst, and listens for a reply. The time between transmission and the

response gives you an estimate of network lag. A lower ping (measured in Milliseconds) is better.

TCP/IP: Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol. The basic communication language of the internet. Made up of two layers; the TCP layer disassembles and reassembles files into and from packets; the IP layer makes sure each packet gets to the correct destination.

V.90: A standard approved by the International Telecommunications Union for 56k downstream data transmission. This is a combination of 3Com/U.S. Robotics' X2 standard and Rockwell's K56Flex which are two incompatible 56k standards.

Winmodem: Also called a software modem. A modem that uses software and the power of modern CPU's to perform the functions that are usually accomplished by a dedicated chip on a regular modem. Winmodems lack these chips.

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THE FUTURE OF GAMES

MEDIA



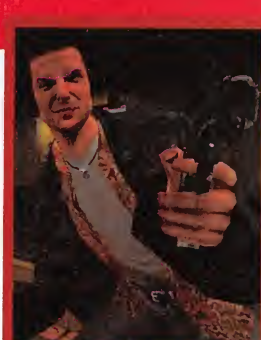
Black & White
p36



Freelancer
p40



Simsville
p44




Max Payne
p46



Commandos 2
p48



32000



* So, what is the future of games? Would we find it in breathtakingly original gameplay Or in finely honed improvements upon existing genres? And what about in technology? Is 3D graphics still the shining light? Or will the internet replace it as signifier of the state of the art? And will the games we play still be obsessed with big guns, tanks and aliens?

PCPP has thought long and hard about all these questions. But narrowing it all down to one simple answer has proved impossible. Thus, over the next thirty pages we present you with ten radically different alternatives. The future is out there, somewhere...



X-Com Alliance
p52



Dungeon Siege
p54



Sacrifice
p56



Hitman
p58



Warcraft III
p60



BLACK &

Peter Molyneux's roleplaying game where you play the role of God is baffling, bizarre, and quite probably brilliant. But what's it all about?

DETAILS

- Genre: Roleplaying God Sim
- Players: 1-Multi
- Developer: Lionhead
- Publisher: EA Games
- Due: September

* "I used to have one of those little Tamagotchi things," recalls Peter Molyneux, Lionhead's founder and the main man behind Black & White. "When someone drowned it in a cup of coffee after twenty-six days, I was gutted; I was completely heartbroken and I have never touched a Tamagotchi since. And I have a feeling it's the same with this."

Of course, he's referring to the emotional impact of the game, rather than never wanting to play it again. So, would he consider it a compliment if someone suggested that Black & White is something like a glorified Tamagotchi? "I really was totally inspired by Tamagotchi. And I thought that if I could become emotionally attached to a purple egg - I couldn't even make out what was on screen - then what sort of attachment could I have with a really sophisticated creature, one with the coolest AI ever seen?"

Demons and angels

When you begin Black & White, your really sophisticated creature - like a baby Tamagotchi - isn't particularly sophisticated at all. To demonstrate this, Molyneux chooses an ape to be his worldly "avatar". At the start, he's this small, insignificant chimp, more or less life-size. He scratches himself, wanders around playing with and examining things, and does backflips to show off.

However, you can train him to do things, usually by getting his attention and showing him something. You can scold him - slap! - or you can stroke him - yes, even down there - so that he learns what sort of behaviour is good or bad. Even more cleverly, your creature will learn simply from watching you play the game - if you cast a spell, he'll attempt to mimic it. As the game proceeds, he develops and gets bigger, until by the end he's this huge, monstrous being that can rampage through the world and also appears to possess

intelligence and autonomy to a remarkable degree.

But he doesn't merely change in size - he actually changes his physiology as well. Feed your creature too much and he'll get fat; starve him and he'll look virtually anorexic. Likewise, the amount of exercise he undertakes will determine how muscular or gangly he becomes. But most importantly of all, the morality of his behaviour is revealed in how Good (with his white fur and immaculate posture he'll seem almost angelic) or Evil (the hunched back and demonic snarl are telltale nasty signs) your creature's appearance has become.

A reactive world

In recent times, Molyneux has been keen to stress that Black & White is a roleplaying game - the twist being that you play the role of God. You can be a mean, vicious, nasty, evil god or a wonderfully kind, benevolent, nice god, or a disinterested, bipartisan mixture of the two. Whichever path you choose, the most important consideration is to ensure that people believe in you.



An epic struggle between cow and tiger.



A noble lion watches over a city.



Hadoken!



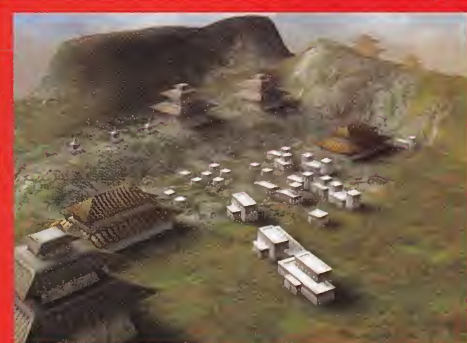
The villagers were suspicious of their new milkman.



WHITE



"YOU CAN BE A MEAN, VICIOUS, NASTY, EVIL GOD OR A WONDERFULLY KIND, BENEVOLENT, NICE GOD..."



Initially, just one small village has been persuaded of the fact of your existence, and as such you are able to interact within its environs. You might, for instance, pick up a rock and throw it. All the villagers who witness this event will cry out - "Oohhhh!" they'll chorus - as they immediately think, "I've just seen a flying rock - that must prove that God exists!" You can pick up villagers and direct them to do things like tending to farms or chopping down trees. You can even - if you wished to put the fear of God, so to speak, into your people - drop rocks on the villagers, throw them out to sea, or get them lost in a distant corner of their island.

Consequently, both the world and your own creature will gradually evolve to reflect what you're like as a god. For Molyneux, this aspect of the game was crucial: "It's a very active - even ultra reactive - world. I really wanted people to play around with the world, to see what would happen if I did this or do that,

almost like a kid's sandpit. If you feel pissed today, you should be able to take it out on the game."

It's at this point that Molyneux pauses, as he notices something strange starting to occur on screen. The ape creature he had chosen as his pet is up to a little bit of mischief. Molyneux is obviously perplexed. "He's dancing - why's he dancing?" he wonders aloud before it becomes clear. "I know what he's doing, he's trying to impress the little villagers. I'll stop him doing that - slap! That's for showing me up."

With the ape thus suitably chastised, it looks for a moment like the situation is under control. But then...

"Now the cow's decided to dance. Why are they both dancing?"

Your correspondent admits he hasn't the faintest idea, but it all seems highly amusing regardless.

"Ah, I know why..." Molyneux says, finally. ►



Architectural styles vary between cultures.

FIERCE CREATURES



The Cow - a passive, strong and noble beast

When you begin *Black & White*, one of the earliest decisions that must be made is which creature you wish to adopt - the ape, the cow or the tiger. The villagers believe in these three mythical beasts, so the presence of one of this trio in their land can only affirm their belief in you as a god. As your avatar in the world, the creature acts as a gauge of your people's belief in you.

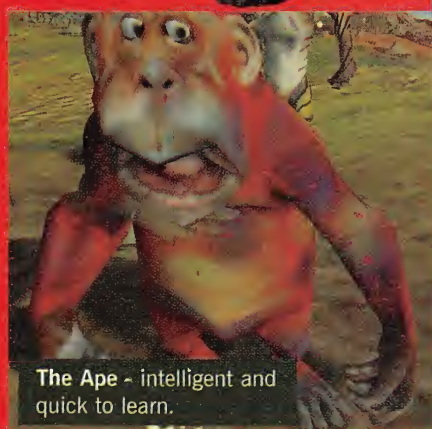
"It's because these little people down here are celebrating because they've just built this house. Remember how earlier I got one of them to chop down some trees? Now the creatures are joining in the party."

Good or evil?

Dancing cows? Masturbating apes? Flying rocks and choosing between good and evil? Right now you're probably wondering just what the hell is going on in this mad world. Well, the point of the whole game - and yes, there is a point - is to gain control of the world by convincing its population to believe in you.



The Tiger - he's aggressive, violent and powerful.



The Ape - intelligent and quick to learn.

There's a strong storyline throughout the game that binds it all together as well.

At certain times of the game, you will encounter scripted events that further the narrative and also force you to make moral decisions. One early instance concerns a woman whose brother has become lost in the nearby forest. She prays for your - God's - assistance, but it's up to you what kind of help she receives. You could be compassionate and rescue her brother; you could be cruel and kill him; you could simply ignore her pleas entirely. If you're Peter Molyneux, though, you would choose to be unspeakably evil.

"I've discovered this new way of being absolutely evil," he grins. "I used to just throw [the woman] across the land to kill her. But now I take her on a little trek to the top of this mountain. I go to the edge of the mountain and just give her a little push off the cliff. Then I can take her dead body, show it to her brother, and he ends up dying of shock."

Molyneux claims that the number of people to whom he shows the game who choose to be good is a surprisingly high 75% - a figure that sits in stark contrast to his own dark desire to

demonstrate each act of cruelty in enthusiastic detail. But that's what makes *Black & White* so fascinating. It's just like one big personality test; it's a virtual experiment at the heart of which sits the player. So, if it really is a glorified Tamagotchi, who is the main character: the creature or the player himself? ■

THE HAND OF GOD

One of the most notable aspects of *Black & White* is its interface. The only onscreen element is a hand - the Hand of God, as it were. Guiding the hand with the mouse, you can grab the earth to scroll across the map and swing the camera around. Any object you wish to interact with can simply be picked up or, in the case of your creature, tapped, tickled, pushed, and slapped about. The player also has access to various "miracles" (or spells) which are summoned by making gestures with the hand. Select the thunderstorm miracle from the village temple, then to cast it you draw a circle on the ground to designate the size you want it. The storm clouds can then be pushed across the world - over the village to scare your people or over the farms to replenish their crops.

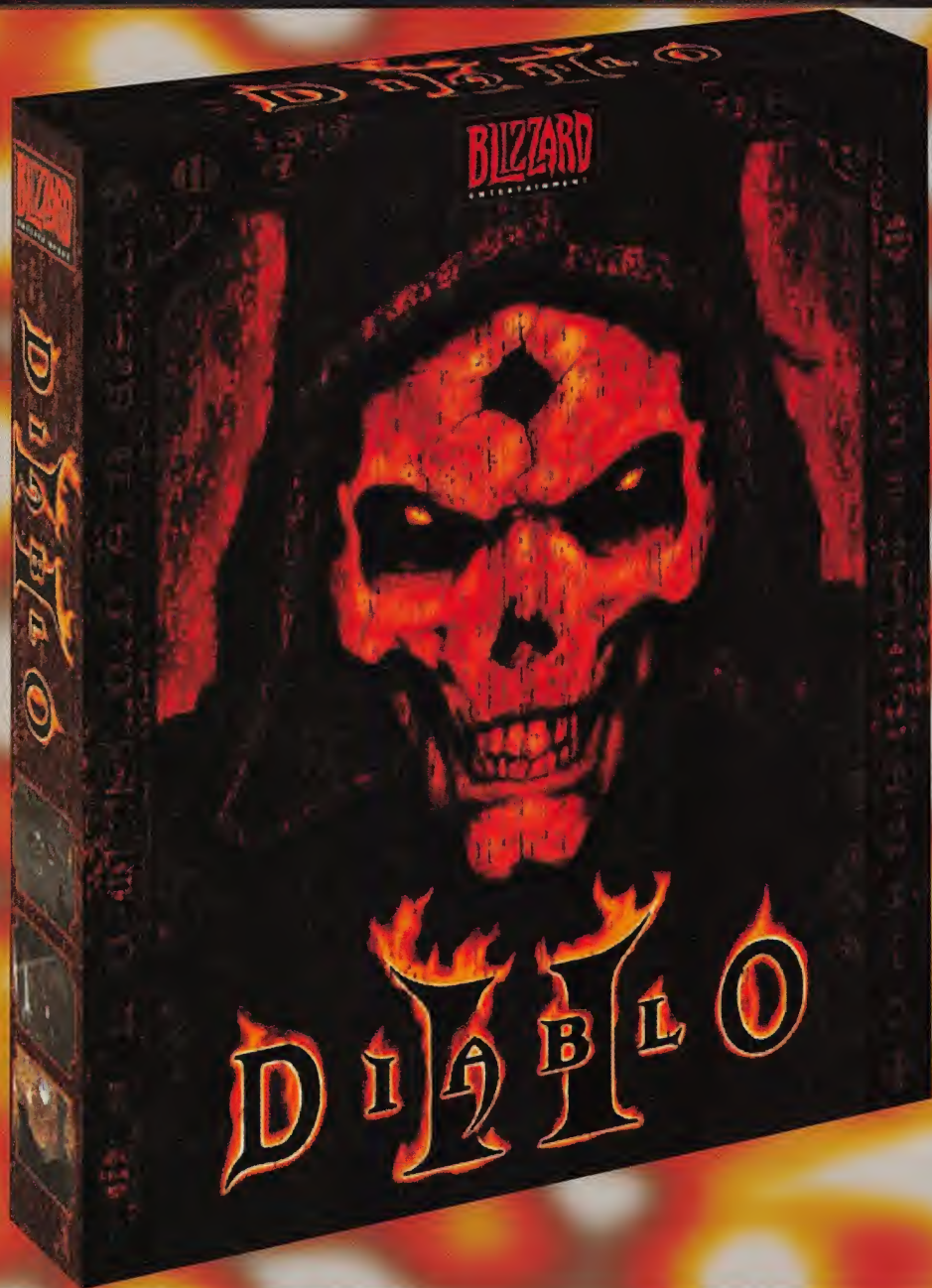


Next month we'll take a closer look at how *Black & White* will work online and as a multiplayer game. We'll discover exactly how a cow does a roundhouse kick...

WHY BLACK & WHITE IS THE FUTURE OF GAMES...

- It's the new game from the creator of *Populous*, *Syndicate* and *Dungeon Keeper*.
- It could revolutionise artificial intelligence in games.
- The graphics engine is truly a sight to behold.
- It's got cows doing roundhouse kicks.

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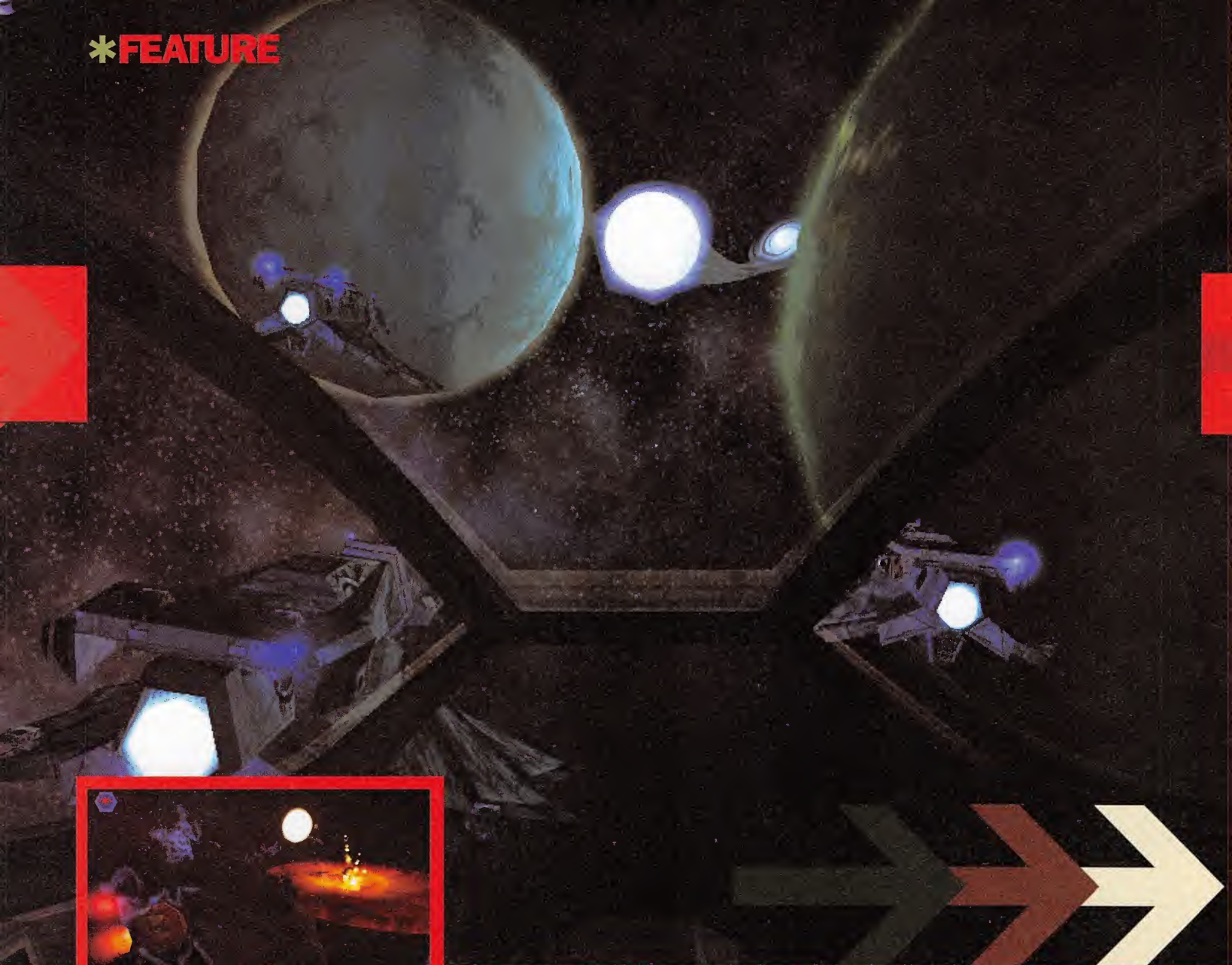


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**"PLAYERS COULD TAKE ON THE
GAME GENERATED MISSIONS
AND PLAY THEM FOR YEARS IF
THEY WANTED..."**

FREELANCER

FLY INTO THE DEPTHS OF SPACE, AND NEVER COME BACK AGAIN...

DETAILS

■ **Genre:** Han Solo Sim

■ **Players:** 1-16

■ **Developer:** Digital Anvil

■ **Publisher:** Microsoft

■ **Due:** 2nd Qtr 2001



Over the ages, what has outer space truly represented to the masses?

Mystery? Depth? Infinity? Freedom? Opportunity? Exploration? Introspection?

While you stew on that one, consider the use of outer space in computer games. Ever since games were devised, somebody's set one within the glorious confines of space. Confining because logically, you can't put infinity onto a disk. So whether a snapshot (think *Space Invaders*, set on a static screen with a space backdrop) or a more dynamic take (think the *Wing Commander* style game, with plenty of "space" to traverse and "hyper-jump" points), games set in the heavens have always been about creating the illusion that the player has the opportunity and freedom to explore the mysterious depths of infinite space, to some varying degree.

And thus far, game developers have done a pretty good job. Games like *Freespace*, the *X-Wing* and the *Wing Commander* series are exemplary. Even the RTS game *Homeworld* did the setting immeasurable service, presenting a positively epic feel to the great, empty beyond. However, the moment you tried to go beyond the boundaries set by the game, you found yourself going nowhere... fast. Within the context of these games, this was absolutely forgivable. But the players that dreamed of visiting those distant stars, that wanted to go beyond the mission objective routes, do something more than just shoot to kill - these players found themselves with little solace.

With *Freelancer*, Chris Roberts and his team at Digital Anvil want to bring a depth to the genre that has only been touched upon before. Games like *Elite* (in the eighties) and Chris' own *Privateer* (in the early nineties) attempted this - and did an admirably job - but given the limitations in hardware, lacked the depth and visual flair a game like this relies upon. Chris Roberts concedes that with the advances in graphics technology and storage

mediums (remember that when *Privateer* was released, 510MB hard drives were more than ample), it was only recently possible to do a space exploration/combat/trading game that would do the genre any real justice. Think the visual feel of *Homeworld*, multiply the detail by a factor of ten and then you've a good idea of what DA has served up with *Freelancer*

Privateer 3

For those of you familiar with *Privateer*, *Freelancer* then is the spiritual sequel to Chris' first attempt at simulating a living, breathing galaxy replete with an active economy, political affiliations and conflict. At last year's E3 (*Freelancer*'s quasi-public debut - where a behind closed doors demo was given), Chris Roberts gave us his manifesto - his hopes and aspirations with the project. However, there wasn't altogether much to show, save the bells and whistles. Sure, the graphics engine looked stunning, giving some fantastic visual effects to the vastness of space and its alien inhabitants. But that was it.

E3 2000 was a different matter entirely. Chris not only took us through gameplay section of *Freelancer*, but also showed how seamless and continuous his virtual universe was, and how various gameplay sections fit together. And... wow! *Freelancer* is incredible! In comparison, all other space combat shooters almost feel like virtual fish tanks. This game is deep, detailed, and absolutely gorgeous.

On the surface, there simply seems to be a lot more of the stuff that made *Privateer* so enthralling. There are more ships to fly, more parts to buy, more people to meet, plenty more star systems and spaceports to visit, not to forget a far more interesting design aesthetic. But beyond the superficial, the obvious, Digital Anvil has crafted a functional universe that ties all the gameplay elements together, and creates the sensation that the player is part of a universe that exists independently of their actions, yet at the same time can affect and play a part in the overall direction of the locale. Considering that this is not only a result of a simple scripting trick (that is: reach area A, cutscene 3.1 plays, opening to location B appears, etc) but a complex quest generation engine, Digital Anvil has created an impressive piece of software.

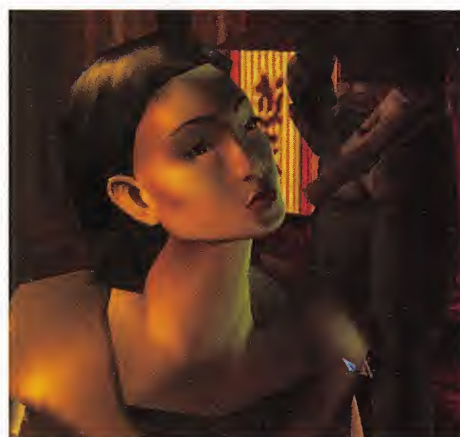
Space colonization

Obviously, *Freelancer* isn't attempting to simulate the entire universe. What you do get is a fairly sizable corner of it to play in. Set approximately 800 years after the events documented in *StarLancer* - at the dawn of the thirtieth century - the solar system has long ago been destroyed by a great cataclysm, and the few survivors have managed to establish a new home in the far reaches of space. After the arduous task of rebuilding, Four Houses of Humanity (separatist factions based upon the empires of Earth) now rule known space. More interestingly, it is a time of exploration into the frontier worlds - of mass expansion. The four houses vie for control of what space they do occupy, and what they quickly discover. The ultimate prize: survival.

Freelancer as a gaming experience - and this is really a great accomplishment in a game



The bars of *Freelancer*. Where players drink, keep informed, and more importantly - find work.



of its type - really depends on what the player wants to do. A player could, for example, take a very safe route in the game and play a simple merchant - shipping goods and supplies to various points in the galaxy for a tidy profit, living from bar to bar, keeping your eyes and ears open for more work. A player could join the military and take part in escort roles, simple patrol routes and later, strike and attack sorties, much like what games like StarLancer offer. If you're not the sort to fight for a cause, perhaps you can use your skills playing a bounty hunter, collecting the tidy reward after successfully subduing a wanted subject. A step beyond that is becoming an outright pirate - preying and feeding off those foolish to venture out into your space without enough protection.

Whichever route you take, the earnings you make can be pumped directly back into your ship - purchasing upgrades and even newer, more appropriate models for the task at hand (some ships will be better suited to combat, whilst others will make better freighter ships). As you upgrade your ship, you'll be able to tackle more challenging, interesting, and ultimately rewarding missions. And should you want to be a jack-of-all-trades - Freelancer will allow players to dabble in all of the various roles available.

The mission generator, as mentioned, is an impressive piece of work. If, for example, pirates have raided a grain supply on a particular planet, then relevant missions will be offered. Bounty missions for the scalps of the pirates will be generated, as will urgent grain delivery runs. You may be lucky enough to stumble in just as the raid is about to take place, and put a stop to the attack. Such events - like pirate raids on establishments - will happen independently of your actions and presence in that game area.

However, remaining a neutral player may be Freelancer's greatest challenge. As you develop a name for yourself in Freelancer, other parties will become interested in your services. Should you take a mission that adversely affects another faction, don't be surprised if they want to meet with you for a friendly little chat to discuss 'possibilities'.

Pick a path

Chris Roberts has stated that players could quite easily play Freelancer like a simulated universe. They could take on the game generated missions and play them for years if they wanted - the generator will just keep

throwing more missions your way. But Freelancer is primarily a single player experience, and Chris wants to tell a fantastic story. As the player progresses through Freelancer, certain story-based missions will be made available. Accept them, and you will become part of a plot that takes you all corners of the universe, and quite possibly, back 'home'. Roberts understands the importance of a weighty narrative to a game like this: it goes a long way in creating a plausible, living and breathing universe. After all, where there's humanity, there'll always be drama. The narrative will play out in all manner of ways - from broadcast news in local bars, direct communication (email and the like and conversation with certain parties) to the familiar cutscene. To help the narrative feel like a part of normal gameplay, all cutscenes will use the game engine, and not fancy and inappropriate full motion video footage.

Watching Freelancer in action is truly breathtaking. Using a 32bit graphic engine, it is one of the prettiest looking games in development. Digital Anvil has included all manner of deep space staples to play about with, like nebulae jump gates, and asteroid fields. The asteroid fields in particular are a sight to behold. Rather than small pocky 'stones' which can damage your ship, Freelancer's asteroids are huge lumbering chunks of rock which a player could almost land upon. Think Empire Strikes Back and you've got a good picture of what they've achieved. And you won't find yourselves in such a dangerous location for an irrelevant challenge - the game will have pointed you towards a starbase or colony within. Make it there in one piece and the game will suitably reward the player. That's if the sheer visual splendour isn't enough of a reward already.

Up close, Freelancer looks stunning. But when you take a step back, the true beauty of the game is plain to see. The universe literally continues to move around you. At your landing pad, for example, ships will take off and land in the background. As you approach a landing destination, traffic will dart to and fro around you. Even in the depths of space, other ships will fly their planned routes around you. You could, quite easily, step back and marvel for ages at the universe you're a part of.

Digital Anvil has created the most absorbing and detailed virtual universe in a computer game to date. We'll just have to wait till early 2001 to find our place in it. ■



WHY FREELANCER IS THE FUTURE OF GAMES...

- An incredibly detailed universe to explore.
- Visually stunning.
- Will give you all manner of roles to play.
- It's a Chris Roberts game.

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SIMSVILLE

AFTER THE SUCCESS OF THE SIMS, MAXIS WON'T REST ON ITS LAURELS. THEY THINK THERE'S STILL PLENTY OF ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT.



DETAILS

■ Genre: Neighbourhood Sim

■ Players: 1

■ Developer: Maxis

■ Publisher: EA

■ Due: 1st Half 2001

* Imagine you're standing at the edge of existence, looking out upon the entire universe. It's probably understating the situation to say that it's a pretty big place - too large and complex to simulate in a computer game, certainly. Let's zoom in, shall we, for several billion light years. Head for that milky swirl over there on the left and keep going. Eventually we'll arrive in our solar system. Weaving past the outer planets - Neptune, Pluto, and the gas giants - we make our way towards Earth. Stop! Sorry, false alarm, this is still too big to squeeze onto our PC - and Maxis should know, having tried and failed with SimEarth.

Gothic household

Time to descend now, through the Earth's atmosphere, before finally levelling out above a major capital city - let's make it Prague, because it looks pretty. Hmm, buildings, roads, parks, cars, and commercial, industrial and residential sectors - this is a city we could sim quite comfortably. We're still a bit distant from things, though; it would be good to get a bit closer, a bit more personal.

Zoom in on that tiny house in the 'burbs. The Goth family lives here: there's a pink flamingo in the front yard, there's Bella on the sofa watching TV, and there's Mortimer in the bathroom, standing in a puddle of... Oh dear! Zoom out, zoom out!

Maxis knows that its previous games had their share of flaws. With Sim City 3000 there was a tendency for the player to feel too detached; in The Sims sometimes it all got just a bit too personal. Simsville's Executive Producer, Christine McGavran agrees: "Our initial motivation with Simsville was to make a game that was more accessible to a wider audience. We know that there are a lot of people who are attracted by the idea of Sim City, but are turned off by certain elements - the statistics, the micromanagement of laying

down powerlines and things like that."

"We've removed a lot of the meticulous and mundane aspects of The Sims," concurs Tim Le Tourneau, Simsville's Producer. "You don't have to direct them to go to the bathroom or to eat. They're individuals who can think for themselves. The way that you interact with them is more through manipulating the environment, which is more of a Sim City type of gameplay. You still get the personal feedback of The Sims, but without the statistics, maps and graphs of Sim City. You're really driven to take care of these people in the town."

Scaling down

Initial impressions might suggest that Simsville has grown out of Maxis' aborted attempt to create Sim City 3000 as Sim City 3D. While from a technical perspective this isn't true - as Simsville uses entirely new code - the team has taken on board many of the lessons it learned from the Sim City 3D experience. Elixir's Demis Hassabis might wish to disagree with the assertion that creating a 3D world as complex as a whole city is impossible, but Maxis maintains that it cannot be achieved on today's - or even tomorrow's - hardware. Also, they realised that this wasn't necessarily the best way to achieve their aim.

"The design for this game actually emerged from Simcity," explains McGavran. "Our team was really interested in putting in a lot of these personal gameplay elements, so that you know who works where and what they're doing now. We really wanted to do that, but it's very, very hard with millions of people! When we latched





“...SIMSVILLE IS AN ATTEMPT TO FIND THE PRECISE MIDPOINT BETWEEN SIM CITY AND THE SIMS.”

upon the idea of doing a small town game, we realised it would give us the freedom to really get to know everybody in the town. It's a dream come true for our design team.”

Sim serial

Hence Simsville is an attempt to find the precise midpoint between Sim City and The Sims. However, the connection between the three games goes even further than that. Maxis is planning to allow the player to link the trio together, so that you might take your family from The Sims and move them into Simsville; likewise, elements of Simsville will be transferable into Sim City.

McGavran describe hows the benefits of doing this have already been made apparent. “When I've been demoing this, every single

person I've shown it to has recognised the Goths, the Roomies, and the other Sims characters,” she says. “It's going to make it easier for people to get into when they already know something about the game.”

Ultimately, Simsville is all about people and their relationships; that's really what makes Sim games so fascinating and so addictive. And Simsville takes it further - further than even The Sims, which was essentially all about bodily functions when you get down to it. Here, you could imagine, or even put yourself into the game, recreate your family as a virtual Sim family, or design Simsville to be the place where you live or where you were born. Maxis is counting on the fact that people find people inherently interesting - at least more so than cities or planets or galaxies. They could well be right. ■



WHY SIMSVILLE IS THE FUTURE OF GAMES...

- It's Sim City without the boring bits.
- It's The Sims without the boring bits.
- Relationships are infinitely more interesting than statistics.
- You can still torture your Sims.

MAX PAYNE

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MEN IN TRENCH COATS BRANDISHING PIECES GET TOGETHER.

DETAILS

■ Genre: Action

■ Players: 1

■ Developer: Remedy

■ Publisher: Gathering Of Developers

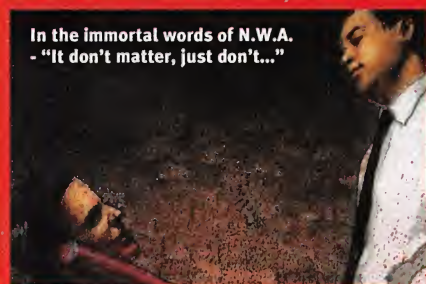
■ Due: When it's done

COMIC HERO

At the end of every chapter or scene, the game will automatically save a screenshot from the gameplay and add it to a work-in-progress. Much like a comic-book, these pictures will document the events thus far in Max's adventure. And where better to display this than over the Max Payne loading screens?



In the immortal words of N.W.A.
- "It don't matter, just don't..."



*Go on. If you haven't already, go and have a quick flick through the rest of the titles in this feature that marks the future of games. Good.

Did you notice something? That's right - not a firstperson action game to be seen amongst this highly select group of games. The only to come close to the traditional FPS is X-COM Alliance, and that's exclusively in appearance too - X-COM is primarily a tactical squad-based adventure game, not an "all guns blazing" type affair.

Put simply, the age-old firstperson action genre, exemplified by the likes of Doom, Quake, and Duke Nukem 3D - and the pinnacle of visceral action gaming - ain't what is used to be. Developers are taking it in all sorts of different directions, diversifying what was once a very simple formula for success. Take Half-Life, System Shock 2 and Deus Ex as perfect examples of this. Further more, if E3 2000 - a showcase of the next two years of computer gaming - is anything to go by, then the humble ol' FPS is looking very much like a near-extinct species.

Understandably so - the genre's been done to death. While a frenetic action blast will always remain a staple in many a gamer's play regime, the lure of sharper visuals and higher poly-counts just isn't cutting it any more. After all, once you've shot one alien/demon-from-hell/trooper, you've shot 'em all.

So what's happening to this style of play? Where's it going? Sure, we want alternatives. But not necessarily those damn adventure game chock-full of boring dialogue and stat-management screens. We want a good ol' shoot 'em up, but we want something fresh...

Call me Payne

Enter Max Payne. He's the star of Remedy's action shooter game currently in development, and the man responsible for taking the action shooter to the next level. The man's a double-gun-toting hero in a heavy trench coat (read: Max Payne reeks of style), so don't expect Trans-Universal Microwave Melting Pop Devices and Nuclear Hand Guns to be at your immediate disposal. Nope, Remedy has opted to tell a tale in the grimy streets of contemporary New York, meaning real

weapons (sometimes truth can be stranger than fiction - these weapons WILL hurt those on the receiving end), real people (in their ambiguous glory), and plenty of that infamous home-grown NY 'tood. As a result, Remedy has focused on visual accuracy in portraying the city, taking their artists on excursions to the Big Apple for extensive photo sessions. The effort can be seen in Payne's visuals - featuring beautifully rendered backdrops ranging from the grit of the subway network to the polished sheen of high-rise (and low-life) of NYC.

Unlike the tacked-on plots of most action titles, Max Payne's story will be a driving feature of the game, designed to hurl players on a twisted ride through to the final, gripping showdown. As an undercover cop in NYC, Max Payne has infiltrated one of the biggest crime syndicates in the country. Honing in to the heart of the mafia, Max' superior officer is murdered and the blame is pinned on Payne. So Max Payne is a man on the run. With the ensuing scandal, both the top law enforcement agencies and the NYC mafia are out for Payne's blood. Obviously, Max Payne is a man without a heck of a lot to lose. A man that can afford to take a few risks.

Muzzling

Max Payne, therefore is a man (and game) of action. Gameplay is presented using a thirdperson perspective - an atypical choice for shooter action games. Remedy reasons that to utilise the many moves at Max's disposal, the firstperson perspective just wouldn't cut it. This perspective suits Payne's cinematic style, removing the jarring transition from firstperson gameplay to thirdperson cutscenes and movies.

As far the gameplay, this perspective does give players a grand view of Max's acrobatic exploits. For Max can perform a whole host of impressive attacking and defensive manoeuvres, like diving to the side with guns still blazing, falling backwards (guns a blasting) preparing for a retreating roll. Think The Matrix and you've got a good idea of the style of combat that will feature in Max Payne (although Remedy has stressed that all good action movies have provided inspiration). In a further nod to the fight scenes featured in



"THINK THE MATRIX AND YOU'VE GOT A GOOD IDEA OF THE SYTLE OF COMBAT THAT WILL FEATURE IN MAX PAYNE..."

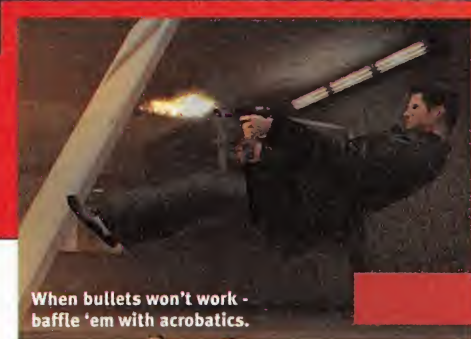
films like John Woo's Mission Impossible 2, Remedy has introduced a slow motion system to combat. As suggested, gameplay will be slowed down to allow players to engage in some thrilling and strategic gunfights - a stark contrast to the fast-paced action of the typical action game. Fear not though that Max Payne will degenerate into Swan Lake With Baseball Bats - use of the slow motion system will be left to the player's discretion, with it only being forced during important battles and during the ever-pleasing, slow motion, fancy camera-work, action replays.

Snarl!

While Remedy has focused on the story and action mechanics of Max Payne, they haven't forgotten the small and important details. As

already mentioned, the backdrops to the game are all class. Well, so are the characters themselves. Using a skeletal animation system, Remedy has added several layers of 'skins' on top of this for fantastic detail. So that trench coat you see Max wearing will flap and billow about in movement. Characters faces feature careful detail, eschewing fantastic facial expressions. Weapons, too, feature stunning particle and volumetric effects (just wait until you see the muzzle flash of a gun in motion).

And should you worry that all this detail will be a tad too taxing on the system, the MAX-FX engine uses a level-of-detail system that renders objects in the distance with less polygons than those in close proximity to the player. Another system used is what is called 'exit optimisation' - where the engine only



When bullets won't work - baffle 'em with acrobatics.

renders what the player can see at any one time. Tricks like these help improve frame rates and allow for the attention to detail that Remedy has gone for. Unsurprisingly, Max Payne will require a 3D accelerator.

Max Payne highlights a welcome move from the norm of action gaming. And while story elements will play a major role in the game, it's pleasing to note that this won't diminish the action elements. And that the attention to detail and realism doesn't take from the almighty fun factor that Max Payne clearly exudes. ■

WHY MAX PAYNE IS THE FUTURE OF GAMES...

- A hardcore action game in thirdperson.
- Allowing for full-on Matrix style air-based skirmishes.
- A high level of character and world detail.
- And a fantastic storyline to boot.



Lips is the perfect diversion.



This plane is just asking to be blown up.

"VIGILANT GUARDS WILL FOLLOW SUSPICIOUS FOOTPRINTS LEFT IN THE SNOW OR MUD..."



*FEATURE

COMMANDOS 2

WE THOUGHT THE NAZIS WERE ABOUT DUE FOR ANOTHER ARSE KICKING. VOILA!

DETAILS

■ **Genre:** Strategic Sabotage
■ **Players:** 1-16
■ **Developer:** Pyro Studios
■ **Publisher:** Eidos
■ **Due:** Q4 2000

✱ **Commandos: Behind Enemy lines** exists as irrefutable proof that a game's success does not hinge on a marketing budget greater than the GNP of the average third world nation. On the strength of a fantastic demo, word of mouth and countless rave reviews, in excess of one million copies of the game were sold in the two years since its release. **Commandos** was by no means perfect, but its compelling gameplay, incredible visuals and exceptional audio all conspired to thoroughly addict the player.

If what we saw at E3 is any indication, **Commandos 2** looks certain to not only repeat the success of its predecessor, but to surpass it by a sizeable margin. Feedback and suggestions from thousands of **Commandos** devotees has seen the principal gameplay dynamic shift from the puzzle-oriented strategy of the first game, to a style that focuses primarily on tactics. Especially encouraging is the fact that the infuriating and ridiculously restrictive skill system (that, among other things, prevented characters other than the Driver from operating even the most simplistic vehicles) has been ditched in favour of one that is far more sensible and realistic. "With a few exceptions, the characters can now perform all the required tasks" Project Leader and Lead Designer, **Gonzo Suarez**, explained. "Some characters are simply more efficient at doing so. For example, all the characters have the ability to swim, but they can't descent below the surface. This leaves them open to detection and attack by watchful German soldiers. Conversely, the Diver has an

artificial supply of oxygen that allows him to remain submerged indefinitely, and thus swim without fear of being compromised by the splashing that normally accompanies surface movement."

Tandem tank driving

Gonzo then discussed some of the skill limitations that the player will have to deal with. These relate to the specialisations of each of the characters. As such, "the Sapper is the only character with the expertise required to set and detonate explosive charges. And, while all of the characters can drive Jeeps, only the Driver has the ability to handle unconventional vehicles like German tanks. But, because tanks are operated by crews rather than a lone soldier, the Driver will only be able to steer the tank, and the Sapper will have to be on hand to operate the tank's main gun" he said.

Another pleasing change has been applied to the inventory system. Characters will be able to carry certain items, even if they don't have the skills required in order to use them. They will also be permitted to exchange items between one another.

Thus, the Commando, who excels in silently taking out unwary adversaries, could infiltrate a weapons depot and steal a batch of TNT, then pass it on to the Sapper waiting outside. **Commandos 2** makes use of a brand new engine created from scratch. This has allowed the design team to introduce a host of awesome new features. Most notable amongst these is the fact that, when a character enters a building, the game's viewpoint shifts to show the structure's interior, thrusting them into a completely different combat environment. The tactical implications of this ability to enter structures are manifold. In the original **Commandos**, buildings simply served as concealment points for the player, and spawning points from which swarms of

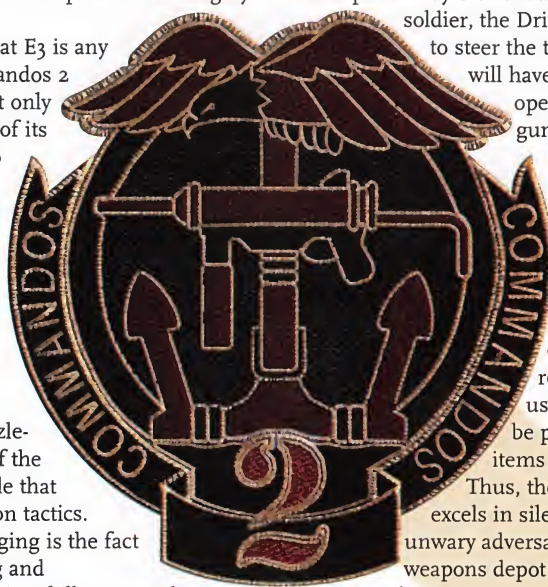


soldiers would pour in response to emergency sirens. This time around, they will be used for the accommodation of soldiers and the concealment of characters, but they will also house valuable documents, weapons, vehicles and countless other items. The effect of this factor, alone, on the type of missions offered will be enormous.

Larcenous Lupin

Interior environments will prove advantageous for some of the game's characters- the Sniper in particular. Sniping from windows at Germans patrolling outdoors will be possible, as will sniping at those ensconced within buildings in the character's direct line of sight. For Paul 'Lupin' Toledo, **Commandos 2**'s new Thief character, the indoor domain will be a pilferer's paradise; his safe-cracking skills will undoubtedly prove invaluable in the covert acquisition of classified documents, and his capacity for pick-pocketing and silent movement will make him a favourite among fans of *Looking Glass*' acclaimed firstperson sneaker. Along with Lupin and the original six characters, 'Lips'- who made her debut in the *Beyond the Call of Duty* expansion pack- will make an appearance. Pyro are also considering the inclusion of a dog whose duties would include the distraction of German soldiers, and the ferrying of items between distant characters.

Commandos 2's visuals are truly a sight to behold. *Behind Enemy Lines* was one of the most lavish looking titles of its time, and Pyro





The Pacific Rim will serve as a backdrop for many missions.



A diver going under.



An ice-bound German battleship.



unwittingly set a new graphical precedent when the game shipped. Few believed them capable of improving on the original but, somehow, they've managed to exceed all expectations. The hand-drawn character animations are extraordinarily fluid, with a process called 'filtering' enabling the developer to up the realism ante significantly. According to Gonzo, "Filtering creates an interaction between the animations and the environments. It allows the player to see the enemy's head face in the direction he's actually looking, and his weapon aim in the direction he's firing. We have also used the filtering process on the tracks and wheels of vehicles to the player the impression that they've been outfitted with independent suspension."

Mission environments are as diverse as they are pleasing to the eye. In Japan, gun emplacements and bamboo huts have been convincingly represented, and palm trees dot the sandy atolls of the Pacific Rim. One especially interesting mission will see the player making a daring escape from Colditz, one of Germany's most infamous concentration camps, and a secret U boat pen should provide ample opportunity for the player to commit numerous acts of sabotage.

The self-preservation instinct

The game's AI has also been subjected to a major revamp. Vigilant guards will follow suspicious footprints left in the snow or mud, and will treat any area in which a comrade has

been slain with suspicion. If they choose to approach such areas, they will do so cautiously, and with their weapons at the ready. But others may choose not to approach an area at all, instead electing to alert their superiors or return with reinforcements. Squads of Allied soldiers will make frequent appearances throughout the course of the game. Although they won't come under direct player control, they will respond to player orders to guard specific areas. This will make it possible for the player to set up deadly ambushes, then lure enemy soldiers to their doom.

Though hampered by the fact that it was all but essential for players to coordinate their efforts verbally, the multiplayer component of Commandos was simply phenomenal. Commandos 2 will feature cooperative play that supports up to sixteen players, and Pyro are exploring the possibility of deathmatch-style adversarial combat. In all likelihood, this mode will ship as part of an add-on pack, but the inclusion of a cooperative mode is, thankfully, guaranteed.

After seeing Commandos 2 in action, and discussing the game at length with Gonzo, it looks certain to be everything the first game should have been, and a hell of a lot more. The only down side to the equation is the thought of waiting until the final quarter of this year to play it. Our hopes rest on a demo release to keep us occupied until then. ■

WHY COMMANDOS 2 IS THE FUTURE OF GAMES...

- It's Commandos, only better.
- An almost infinite number of ways to complete each mission.
- Cool new characters who are eager to kick some Nazi butt.
- Two words: urban sniping.

Get into the fast lane

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"...THE PLAYER WILL HAVE TO
MANAGE THE EMOTIONAL AND
PHYSICAL CONDITIONS OF THEIR
TROOPERS..."



DETAILS

- Genre: Spellcasting RTS
- Players: 1-Multi
- Developer: Shiny
- Publisher: Interplay
- Due: 4th Qtr 2000

* Think back to the scene in *Aliens* where a tight team of mercenaries first probes a decaying complex on LV426's surface. As the crew creep tentatively through narrow passageways, the fear on their faces, their posture - heck, in every cautious movement - is almost tangible. And we, the audience, know that this apprehension is no character flaw - we know exactly what the team is up against, and it definitely ain't pretty. What makes this scene so memorable (and the many others like it in the movie) though is the way the characters handle the situation - the way their emotions manifest themselves. Some characters ease their tension by throwing wisecracks. Some

advise retreat whilst others flaunt danger and doggedly persist. The dynamic nature of the interplay between these characters in this utterly tensile situation is pure genius...

New school

That's fantasy squad-based warfare in a nutshell for you. And the type of setting Microprose wants to achieve with *X-COM Alliance*, the next in a highly respected series of tactical squad-based games. The Alliance development team concedes that its latest effort may be a little unsettling to old school fans. After all, the *X-COM* series of the past employed a thirdperson perspective and gave players almost full control of the squad. For the new age, the *X-COM* series has employed a far more immersive and intimate firstperson perspective in *Alliance*. Using a heavily customised version of the Unreal engine has allowed the development team to create a richly detailed world for players to explore.

X-COM: ALLIANCE

A FANTASTIC SQUAD-BASED ADVENTURE - UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL.



Alliance will take players to fantastic, alien locations.



But it is the implementation of squad control that elevates Alliance above typical sequel fare. In keeping with the series, players will be able to issue orders to teammates (using an intelli-cursor system not dissimilar to that used in SWAT 3) - but whether they'll follow them is another matter entirely. With realistic behaviour and emotion patterns, each of the squad members has a full character dossier that will dictate how they will behave in any given situation. Push them too hard, and fatigue may affect their better judgement, making them more susceptible to the enemy.

The reason? Microprose created realistic characters so that you bond with them, care for them, empathise with them. This will hopefully make your role as squad commander - upon whose decisions rest the fate of many - a far more challenging and rewarding one. The future of games? Absolutely. ■

MICROPROSE TALKS X-COM

AN AUDIENCE WITH ALIENS - A CHAT WITH MARTIN RISO AND CHRISTOPHER DAVID CLARK, PRODUCER AND DESIGNER OF X-COM ALLIANCE, RESPECTIVELY.

■ It's been a long wait for fans of the X-COM series. What are you currently working on with Alliance?

Riso: The team is cranking away on a lot of things at once: the movies, the levels, the models and animations, weapons and weapon effects, creature and trooper AI, the research system, etc. Right now, we're about to head into the studio to get our speech recordings done (and there's a ton of it!).

■ What role will the player take in the game?

Clark: The player takes on the role of the squad commander aboard the UGS Patton, an X-COM research vessel launched in 2063 on an expedition to the alien's Cydonia base on Mars. Through a series of events, the crew of the Patton find themselves stranded light years from Earth - and in the middle of an interstellar war!

■ Environments have been a key feature in past X-Com games: claustrophobic buildings, danger lurking beyond every dark corner. Will we see this in X-COM Alliance?

Clark: Our level designers have the sole purpose of making the X-COM universe come alive. There will be dark and scary environments, as well as different planets, space stations, and star ships, to name a few locations.

More importantly, we want you to feel like an alien can come around every corner or burst through any air vent. We also have a unique opportunity to show players where some of the aliens from UFO Defense/Enemy Unknown live. We are taking great care in making sure that these worlds provide the fear and apprehension present in the original.

■ We've heard that there'll be no base building/maintenance. How about research and manufacture?

Clark: Since the Patton is stranded far from home, the player and his squad will have to "live off the land," collecting weapons and ammunition as they progress through the game in order to keep the Patton's armoury stocked. The player will have to manage his supplies closely in order to survive. Additionally, the player will have to manage the emotional and physical conditions of their troopers to maintain combat effectiveness.

No game can truly be an X-COM game without research. Players will have to learn how to operate all new weapons and equipment types before they become available for use. To research an item, players will have to leave squad members behind on the Patton. This

forces the player to make intelligent decisions about who to assign to a research project and who to take along with him on a combat mission.

■ So X-Com: Alliance has a heavy strategy component. What about the weapons? What will see in the final version?

Clark: Right now there are sixteen weapons in the game, including the venerable X-COM Rifle and Pistol, Laser Rifle, Grenades, and Demolition Charges. There are many new alien weapons as well. It has been over fifty years since the First Alien War featured in UFO Defense/Enemy Unknown, and we wanted to show that the aliens have been improving their weaponry over this period. Our Fusion Pistol is an example of this progression in alien technology. We are taking a lot of time to perfect the weapons' look, reload animations, firepower, effects, etc. Not only must they be visually stunning in the 3D world but they must also be decidedly and recognisably X-COM as well.

■ In past X-COM games every trooper got their own skills, but no specialised units. The choice to use the weak ones as Red Cross nurses or worse, as cannon fodder, was a common one. What role will specialists play in Alliance?

Clark: In Alliance your troopers are everything! The game is mission based and each mission has objectives that must be completed by using particular trooper skills. Acting as the Squad Leader, the player is responsible for making sure that the proper mission specialists reach and complete their objectives. If the player uses his troopers as cannon fodder, he will not just receive a negative score but will fail the mission and thus the game.

We want to have the most lifelike squadmates ever found in a squad based game. There are twelve troopers, each with their own voice, personality, fighting style, and set of skills. Troopers will communicate with the player and each other through speech and movement. In fact, each trooper has over 200 lines of speech and over 300 individual motions! Their emotional and physical conditions can change throughout the course of a mission as well. Troopers can have high or low morale, be disappointed at themselves or at a situation, be secure or insecure about their surroundings... and yes, they will panic! A trooper's combat behaviour will also change based on his or her emotional or physical condition. All of these features contribute to the player thinking of his troopers not as cannon fodder but as people vital to both his survival and the survival of the Patton's crew.

WHY X-COM: ALLIANCE IS THE FUTURE OF GAMES..

■ Squadmates release primal screams as they're dragged away by creatures of the dark.

■ It will be a terrifying tale of survival in alien climes.

■ It's squad-based AND used a firstperson perspective.

■ It features little silver men.

DUNGEON SIEGE

AN RTS PIONEER TINKERS WITH THE RPG, TO SURPRISING RESULTS.

DETAILS

■ **Genre:** Hack 'n' Slash

■ **Players:** 1-10

■ **Developer:** Gas Powered Games

■ **Publisher:** Microsoft

■ **Due:** Early 2001

* Just in case you haven't been following his exploits, this is what Chris Taylor has been working on ever since he left Cavedog Entertainment and his revered Total Annihilation series behind: a roleplaying game. Rancid orcs, giant spiders and lumbering yetis have replaced hulking battle units, piercing air-superiority fighters, and energy harvesters. Naturally. It's a logical progression, when you think about it - RTS to RPG, ahhrrrr teeeee ehhhs to ahhrrrr peeeee geeeee. Replace a couple of letters and there you have it.

It's not surprising then, that Dungeon Siege will contain a significant number of gameplay mechanics that have featured prominently in the beloved RTS. "We wanted to build an RPG, but we didn't want to do it quite like everybody else is doing it. We wanted to expand the genre, we wanted to do some

things that were obvious and some things that aren't so obvious. We wanted to bring in all those RTS elements that we really liked. We wanted big, mix-it-up, over-the-top battles: things on fire, things blowing up. We wanted to break some rules," explains Taylor, a manic gleam emanating from his eyes. So Gas Powered Games - the games development company Taylor formed after leaving Cavedog - meticulously crafted the Siege engine to do just that. But more on this later.

"We wanted the game to be accessible, easy to pick. But we also wanted an RPG with depth - a game with the complexity to please the hardcore players too," Taylor enthuses.

While Taylor is keeping the story, character advancement and skill system under wraps for now ("I want to save something for when you all buy the game"), he's more than willing to discuss just how easy Dungeon Siege is to get into. "Someone installs the game and five minutes later, they're in the thick of the action," he explains.

Literally. After you select your character (either male or female avatars are available - trans-gendered characters probably won't make it into the game) and name it, you start the

game in your humble abode. There are foul beasts ("damn chicken molesters" as Taylor puts it) just outside laying waste to your beloved chickens (Taylor likes his chicken, it seems). Within moments of gaining your bearings, your protective and survival instincts kick in and you start hacking into the unwelcome visitors (after having mouse clicked on a selected character). That's it. There's no protracted introduction to the game, nor a massive backstory to digest. A massive plot will unravel while you play, and Gas Powered Games are promising a doozy.

Marvellous

The Siege engine employs a thirdperson perspective and supports 3D - a rare choice for RPG games in this age of 3D accelerated marvel (only last year's Darkstone and Ultima IX: Ascension have attempted this before, with mixed results). Where the Ultima IX 3D engine was designed primarily to better immerse players within a detailed world, the Siege engine does this as well as lay the foundations for the frenetic "over-the-top" battles so desired by Dungeon Siege's developers.

Featuring a host of the latest graphical bells and whistles (32-bit textures, realtime lighting effects - coloured too - and a fully rotatable perspective are on the list), Dungeon Siege certainly looks the part. The game will take players to all manner of locations, ranging from pleasant green meadows, deep forests, frozen winterlands, arid deserts, to the absolute crux of any dungeon hack - the dungeon itself. Superficially, the graphics are on par with games circa 2000. Beyond that, the less obvious details are what caused a stir at the E3 demo. As Chris directed a party of characters onto a bridge of a chasm, he pointed out the deep reverberation of the gap. To be sure: the chasm extended beyond anything we've seen in such a title, with fog ultimately disguising its true depth. So Chris took control of the camera and sent it careening down the vast space and through the fog, extending for hundreds of virtual feet until it hit the bottom. And according to Gas Powered Games, this sort of stuff isn't just for show: exploring the depths of the DS world

Siege's graphics engine creates gosh darn pretty effects such as these.





“..THE SIEGE ENGINE TRANSPARENTLY LOADS UP THE GAMEWORLD AROUND THE PLAYER WHENEVER THEY’RE IN MOTION..”



will offer a variety of rewards.

The character animations have also been given careful attention, with a system that responds in realtime to action within the game. For example, a skeleton (and there’ll be plenty of them in Dungeon Siege) draws back an axe in preparation for a simple swing, but is dealt a fatal blow by an opponent. Rather than jerking back to a relatively passive position to begin the death animation mid-swing, the Siege engine creates a smooth transition between commands issued and the characters current pose. And in a game where combat is abundant, the visual effects this produces are stunning, especially in motion.

This maxim of smooth transition extends to the gameworld itself. Chris Taylor doesn’t want the player to see a loading screen the entire time you play the game (maybe, with the obvious exception, of save game restores). So the Siege engine transparently loads up the gameworld around the player whenever they’re

in motion, providing an entirely seamless experience - no simple feat when you consider the size of the playing world and the complexity of it.

Biff!

As for the combat - Dungeon Siege will feature plenty of large scale battles. Heck, they’ve given the provision for up to have another nine characters in your party, bringing the total up to ten. That translates to a buck of a lot of action on screen at any one time. Here’s where the RTS element comes in - looking after these characters in battle could be a right royal pain in the arse if no management system was brought into place. So Gas Powered Games has pinched some RTS staples to ensure playability. Players will be able to group characters, set formations, issue orders, and, of course, take control of any character and the click of a button. GPG has also spent time ensuring that should players want to concentrate on the one

character, the party mates will behave with some semblance of intelligence. Archer characters, for example, will fire missiles at the enemy from a distance, and automatically equip a melee weapon should an opponent come within range.

Multiplayer

Dungeon Siege won’t just be a singular affair, allowing up to ten players to attempt the game in multiplayer. Most interesting though, is the planned inclusion of short multiplayer “battles”. After choosing basic conditions (like number of kills, gold/loot collected, etc), players can engage in short term skirmishes with variations of traditional FPS games - ranging from king of the hill to straight deathmatch.

If Gas Powered Games can put as much effort into the narrative of the adventure as they have in the engine, Dungeon Siege could well be the next step in the evolution of the beloved action adventure game. ■

WHY DUNGEON SIEGE IS THE FUTURE OF GAMES..

■ It’s a 3D Action RPG.

■ With an emphasis on the action.

■ Orcs and goblins aplenty.

■ Within a huge seamless world, meaning no loading screens!



Someone should tell Shiny to lay off the chemical substances.

**"...WITNESS A WIZARD
CONJURING UP A HUGE
TWISTER...OR A METEOR SHOWER
TO DECIMATE AN ARMY..."**



The new 3D engine allows you to see the action all the way to the horizon.



SACRIFICE

SHINY HAS COINED A NEW TERM WITH THEIR LATEST GAME: SUR-REALTIME STRATEGY.

DETAILS

■ **Genre:** Spellcasting RTS

■ **Players:** 1-Multi

■ **Developer:** Shiny

■ **Publisher:** Interplay

■ **Due:** 4th Qtr 2000

***** In a darkened corner of the Interplay games booth, an extremely tall English-born American is quite obviously the centre of attention. It's not him as such that everyone has gathered to watch, however; it's what he's doing - and what he's wearing. Dave Perry, Shiny's leading Ego-ist - his development team is called Team Ego, after all, with just a hint of irony - has donned a ridiculous pair of virtual reality goggles to demonstrate the proper, virtually 3D version of his forthcoming 3D realtime strategy game, *Sacrifice*. He looks like a prat, it must be said. But the assembled crowd doesn't care, it's transfixed by what is possibly the most visually stunning game currently in development.

Stealing souls

Although it was first announced only a few months ago, *Sacrifice* is surprisingly on schedule to ship before Christmas. After the somewhat anticlimactic release earlier this year of the perennially delayed *Messiah*, it seems Shiny has learnt to keep its mouth shut. "Basically, what we learnt from *Messiah* is don't talk about your games too early," agrees Perry. "You should wait until they're ready to be played." And, indeed, *Sacrifice* does look like it's ready to be played.

The idea behind the cryptic name is that the goal of the game is not merely to defeat your enemies, but to drag their kicking and screaming souls back to your altar and sacrifice them to your god. For much of the game the player controls an earthbound wizard, from a thirdperson perspective. The wizard can cast all kinds of spells: some are strictly offensive (fireballs, meteor showers), some are defensive (healing, protective barriers), while others yet can terraform the world in spectacular fashion (earthquakes, volcanoes). He can also summon

creatures and issue them with typical RTS orders like attack, guard, defend, and follow.

However, the crux of the gameplay remains sacrificing. As but a humble mortal servant, if you can please the big guy upstairs in this manner then He will bestow gifts aplenty to aid your cause. Or, as Perry puts it: "It makes your god have, like, an orgasm, and he'll give you lots more spells." Adding urgency is the fact that each player has an altar to protect, since if it's destroyed, all heavenly ties are severed and it's game over. Thus, maintaining a balance between attack and defence is crucial to the overall strategy.

Despite the expected Shiny touch of the unexpected, Perry is adamant that *Sacrifice* should be considered a realtime strategy game. He believes that strategy is evident in the game's flexibility - perhaps its greatest strength after the technical wizardry of its graphical engine. "You can play as the wizard and you can play as each of the creatures you have," he details. "You can play as Caesar on the hill and just command your troops and not risk your own life. You can be the guy in there hacking and slashing with everyone else, trying to micromanage the battles. To be honest, if you play in our office, you'll get your butt kicked unless you come up with a good strategy."

"The thing I'm most pleased with is that it's not repetitive," says Perry, moving on to reveal the strength of the AI in *Sacrifice*. "You can't play the game the same way over and over. The AI is pretty damn smart - it starts to see what you're doing and, for example, might start sending more flying creatures at you. That totally changes the strategy and you have to start thinking differently. This game will force you to keep changing what you think is the smart way to play the game."

Stunning spells

If there's one concern looming large for Shiny though, it's that *Sacrifice* initially appears confusing; there's so much happening that it could be just a tad overwhelming. Attempts have been made to address this in



two different ways.

Along with the sheer scale of the engine and the extreme beauty of the effects it manufactures, the extraordinary look of the game is reason enough to make you want - desperately - to play it. The *Sacrifice* engine was built with two things in mind: one, to allow the player to see for miles; two, to squeeze hordes of creatures on screen simultaneously. You can check out the movie on this month's coverdisc to see that this is exactly what it can do, and how effective it is. Even more enticing are the spell effects: witness a wizard conjuring a huge twister to ravage the landscape or a meteor shower to decimate an army.

The other factor contributing to the game's accessibility is its interface. Icons are introduced via a right-click menu that actually teaches you how to access them quickly. Given enough practice, it will mean that the gestures needed to issue a command become second nature. Perry is particularly proud of this innovative self-teaching method: "It allows you to issue commands without looking away from the battle. You can just sweep the mouse and issue a command, and your fighting is going to be so much more efficient. If you're slow it's going to keep teaching you until you catch up. You don't have to dumb the game down to make it accessible."

In an era of gaming where "dumbing down" is an all-too-often chosen route, Shiny should be applauded. And yet, while that may well be true, if you want to pursue the complete *Sacrifice* experience and slip inside that silly virtual reality headset, then you're going to have to put up with looking just a little bit dumb yourself. But - hey - that's the kind of sacrifice hardcore gamers like ourselves sometimes have to make. ■

WHY SACRIFICE IS THE FUTURE OF GAMES...

■ It's realtime strategy - but with a twist! Or indeed, a twister.

■ Shiny is always at the forefront of game design innovation.

■ The cool spells make you feel incredibly powerful.

■ In a word: spectacular.

HITMAN

A GAME THAT'S SURE TO INDUCE AN INHERENT DISTRUST OF BALD PEOPLE



You can tell he's hard - his tie is slightly loose.



Thermal wear for the cold-blooded killer.

DETAILS

■ Genre: Precision Assassination

■ Players: 1

■ Developer: IO Interactive

■ Publisher: Eidos

■ Due: Xmas 2000

* The romanticised image of the assassin-for-hire, perpetuated by film classics like *The Professional*, has long been a source of fascination and reverential admiration. For those of us not normally predisposed to a life of premeditated homicide, the mystique surrounding the practiced hitman, who carries out his assignments with an almost clinical sense of detachment, holds an inexplicable attraction. This attraction has inspired Danish developer, IO Interactive, to develop *Hitman: Codename 47* - an intriguing and potentially controversial game.

80% Action, 20% Murder

For those who prefer the plot-heavy, almost intellectual style of titles like *System Shock 2*, *Deus Ex* and the *Thief* series, *Hitman* will be especially appealing. IO has eschewed the wholesale slaughter of enemies and innocents in favour of a more sedately paced gameplay that revolves around meticulous planning and an ability to act calmly in even the most dire situations. Thus, a Rambo-esque approach to the missions may satisfy a craving for carnage but, once summoned, the SWAT team will make short work of those responsible.

Though obviously the climactic point of each mission, the act of performing the hit itself will only represent a minuscule proportion of the effort that must be made in ensuring every operation runs as smoothly as possible. As Producer Eric Adams explains, "The primary goal is to get in, eliminate the target, then deflect blame for the hit. By leaving a matchbook from a club owned by a prominent gang, or a fake fingerprint on a glass, it's possible to implicate others for the crimes you commit. If you succeed in doing this, you'll earn more money."

Memorising the patrol patterns of security personnel, becoming familiar with the layout of the mission environment and noting potential egress and concealment points is

absolutely imperative. As such, much of the player's time will be spent in preparation for the hit and in the cleanup afterward. "The more bodies you leave around, the more money it costs to dispose of them," warns Adams. "At \$10,000 per body, it can be expensive to have the cleaners called in to destroy the evidence!"

Pre mission intelligence will become one of the player's most valuable resources, with pricing on such information corresponding with the difficulty of obtaining it. It will obviously be cheaper to embark on a mission without paying for information, but also much riskier, as seemingly minor details can have a significant bearing on the mission's outcome. For example, the knowledge that entrances to a particular building have metal detectors installed could prove invaluable. Such knowledge would dictate that firearms be abandoned in favour of non-metallic weapons, if the player wished to enter the building in an inconspicuous fashion. Adams emphasises the crucial element of timing: "A lot of missions require the player to accomplish certain goals within a limited timeframe. You may get word that the target will be arriving at a particular place at a specified time, and they will remain there for five minutes. So you have to rush to be there before they leave."

Suspicious swimwear

AI is certain to be one of *Hitman*'s fortes. The AI routines of security staff are a particularly good example. Garden variety, contract hire, security guards will tend to remain oblivious of the events around them, preferring, instead, to contemplate the mysteries of donuts and caffeinated beverages. Conversely, professional bodyguards will possess almost supernatural levels of situational awareness, treating every person as a potential assailant.

Perhaps the most interesting example of the AI's complexity lies in the way bodyguards will take note of the attire of passers-by, and act accordingly. Should the player enter a sauna wearing a dinner suit, the suspicions of bodyguards, and the target himself, will be aroused. The same holds true should the player walk into the lobby of a five star hotel wearing speedos.



"...IT MAY BE NECESSARY TO PAY OTHERS TO CREATE DIVERSIONS AT A PREDETERMINED MOMENT..."

This will force the player to take the location of the target into consideration, as well as the sort of activities he may be engaged in. It may also necessitate the payment of certain persons working within the vicinity of the hit location to prepare drop sites where appropriate changes of clothes and other items can be retrieved. And it may be necessary to pay others to create diversions at a predetermined moment, in order to distract security guards and others who may interfere with the operation.

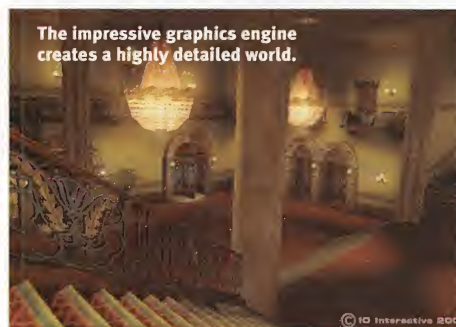
Hitman's emphasis on realism won't stop there, however. There will be a limit to the number of weapons the player can carry simultaneously, based on both the mass and weight of those weapons. And the game's impressive physics engine will ensure that people move and collapse in a realistic fashion, even slumping over furniture and sliding down walls if they happen to be standing near them when killed.

The environments in which operations occur promise to be richly detailed and heavily populated. IO has gone so far as to hire a team of architects to design each of the five levels, which range from the bustling city of Hong Kong to the lush jungle of Colombia. According to the developer, the player will have over thirty weapons with which to carry out their macabre missions, including assault rifles, uzis, pistols, sniper rifles and grenade launchers. Favourites like piano wire garrotes, throwing stars and blowguns will also be available to those who prefer to dispatch their targets in a much quieter manner. A broad range of other items including body armour, night vision goggles, C4, tracking devices, GPS systems and silencers will also be available.

Though currently in Alpha phase, Hitman is rapidly progressing toward completion. Eidos has yet to provide a concrete release date, but estimates that Hitman will appear on shelves by Christmas. Let's hope it's not delayed. ■



Our hero dons a cunning disguise.



The impressive graphics engine creates a highly detailed world.

WHY HITMAN IS THE FUTURE OF GAMES...

■ It's an amazingly interactive world.

■ Bald guys with guns are cool.

■ It takes stealth action to the next level.

■ You always have to think before you shoot.



Spells will be the game's forte.



**"...GOBLIN MERCHANTS WILL
PEDDLE MAGICAL ARTEFACTS
AND WEAPONS FROM THEIR
COMPACT STORES."**

WARCRAFT III

IT'S DESTINED TO BE GOOD, YET WE CAN'T HELP BUT GET PSYCHED ABOUT BLIZZARD'S RTS.

DETAILS

■ **Genre:** Roleplaying Strategy

■ **Players:** 1-Multi

■ **Developer:** Blizzard

■ **Publisher:** Havas

■ **Due:** 1st Half 2001

✱ Blizzard's 1999 announcement of Warcraft III's development was met with unbridled enthusiasm from the RTS community. This latest instalment in the renowned series promised to revolutionise the genre and, as far as many gamers were concerned, could not be released soon enough.

Unfortunately, just prior to this year's E3, Blizzard announced that the game's release would be unavoidably delayed as a result of their decision to alter the game's camera angle. This seemingly minor change held significant implications for the development team, as Producer, **Rob Pardo**, will attest:

"The decision to change the camera angle came when we realised that the current one, floating behind the characters and pointing toward the horizon, was proving far too restrictive from a design standpoint. It prevented us from incorporating a free scrolling camera into the game, and limited how much the player could build. It also forced us to attach units to heroes in order to make the game less disorienting, and we found that we were inadvertently compromising the type of game we wanted to create. Warcraft III was beginning to evolve into an RPG, contrary to our original intention of producing an RTS game with roleplaying elements," he explains.

News of the dramatic redesign of the game (and the associated delay in its release) disappointed many, but this courageous and admirable decision by Blizzard can only benefit those eagerly awaiting Warcraft III's completion.

A brief history lesson

Although not completely finalised, Warcraft III's plot provides an enlightening insight into the history of the conflict-ridden land of Azeroth. The Orcs, it is revealed, were once a proud and noble race of hunters who struggled to survive on their inhospitable home world of Draenor. An innate mastery of the shamanic arts served as the very foundation of their rich culture. The relatively peaceful existence of the

Orc clans was not to last, however.

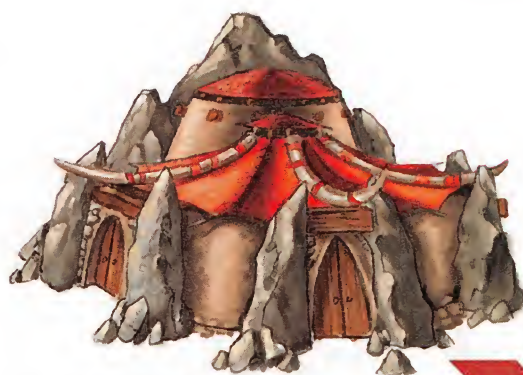
The nomadic Burning Legion, comprised of countless horrific Demon species native to dimensions undiscovered by man, saw the bountiful world of Azeroth as yet another domain to be subjugated in its endless pursuit of primal magic. To that end, the Burning Legion corrupted the Orc race, and combined the clans into a single, bloodthirsty horde. They unleashed the horde upon the tranquil land of Azeroth, hoping that the Orcs would spread chaos and destruction in their wake, and thus weaken the world's defences against the Legion's imminent invasion.

With the unexpected and terrifying arrival of the Orc horde, the Humans mobilised vast armies of knights and archers, and exploited their technological superiority to the fullest. But the war of attrition against the Orcs proved virtually fruitless, as neither side succeeded in defeating the other.

Several decades after the era encompassed by Warcraft II, a young Orc named Thrall, who was captured and raised by the treacherous Humans as a slave, came to the fore as the initiator of great change. After a lifetime of service to the Humans, Thrall had developed an intellect far superior to that of normal Orcs. It was this intellect that enabled him to escape his captors, and saw him unite the fragmented Orc clans.

What followed was a veritable golden age for the Orc species as, under Thrall's wise and enthusiastic leadership, the Orcs rediscovered their shamanistic roots and escaped the bonds of the Legion's curse. The Orc race once again adopted the ancient tenets of honour and survival, and all but ceased its deleterious campaign against the Humans. At the same time, the Human alliance collapsed under the crushing weight of incessant infighting and petty conflict.

Balance was restored to the world of Azeroth, albeit in a completely unexpected manner. It was at this time that the Burning Legion, thwarted in their initial invasion of Azeroth ten thousand years ago by a mysterious race, sought to conquer the realm for the second time. The Orcs and Humans, once bitter enemies, were forced to abandon all hostilities in an effort to repel the Legion's genocidal assault.



Orc accommodation at its finest.



A weapons forge.

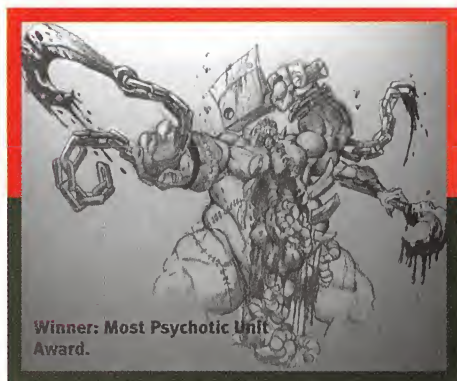
Goodbye grunt rush

Warcraft III will be set in this pivotal era, and will introduce some interesting new refinements to the classic RTS formula. Chief among these changes will be the game's quasi-roleplaying gameplay, dubbed Roleplaying Strategy. The rationale behind the decision to include roleplaying elements within the game stems from a desire to all but negate the effectiveness of the grunt rush tactics that plague, nay characterise, the genre.

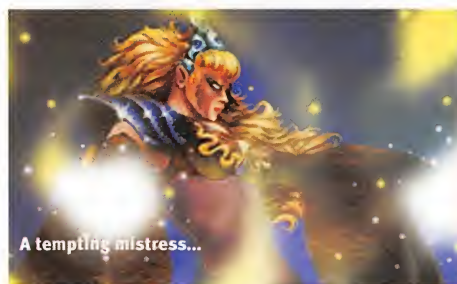
Blizzard's desire to create a game where individual units have value, and don't merely exist as cannon fodder, serves as the impetus for the inclusion of Heroes: special characters that possess various attributes like strength, agility and intelligence. These attributes will increase over time as the Heroes accrue battle ▶



A Demon Hero unit.



Winner: Most Psychotic Unit Award.



A tempting mistress...

experience, making them some of the most powerful units in the game. When Heroes gain enough experience to level up, the player will be able to imbue them with a new spell or ability, compounding their power.

Heroes will also serve a leadership purpose, as their very presence amongst lesser units will enhance their fighting abilities. It stands to reason that the higher the Hero's level, the more units it can lead effectively. Hero units will also have access to a limited inventory, enabling them to carry and wield special items and weapons.

The fact that Heroes will serve the player for the duration of the campaign will further shift the game's focus from construction and unit manufacture to the development of Hero skills, and the production of escort units to ensure that they survive their ordeal. Combat will feature an emphasis on the tactical elements of strategic unit placement, spell casting and spell countering. The importance of effective resource management will also be diminished somewhat, with smaller towns and a single resource: gold.

Caveat realtor?

But, this is all just the tip of the innovation iceberg. Forests, once simply an impassable barrier, will now serve as ideal concealment positions for combat units, and various weather effects like snow, rain and sandstorms will have a tangible effect on gameplay.

Neutral buildings will dot the landscapes, bestowing certain advantages upon those who control them. Observatories, for example, will afford the player an expanded view of the surrounding terrain, and Goblin Merchants will peddle magical artefacts and weapons from their compact stores.

Certain regions will also feature Moonwells: iridescent pools that completely restore the player's mana. A caveat to the unwary: strategically advantageous structures and locations will often be guarded by tribes of

Gnolls. The vicious creatures, who remain unaffiliated with any faction, will instantly attack those who encroach on their territory.

Warcraft III will boast five different playable factions: Human, Orc, Demon, Undead and an as yet unnamed species, making for five separate campaigns! A campaign editor, allowing the player to create custom 3D maps and completely scripted missions, will also ship with the game. Doubtless, multiplayer will be one of the game's major attractions, and the inclusion of cooperative questing is an intriguing concept. As evidenced by the screenshots, Warcraft III's superb visuals retain many of the hallmarks of classic Blizzard titles, in spite of the transition to 3D. A skeletal and skinning animation system makes for equally impressive and remarkably fluid animations.

Once again, Blizzard looks set to rock the gaming world. Barring any unforeseen delays, Warcraft III will appear on store shelves in the first half of 2001. ■

IT'S A 3D WORLD

The way Blizzard has designed the 3D engine is really clever. Not only are the units, objects and terrain all polygonal, but also the camera maintains a constant distance from the ground to give a genuine feeling of depth to the world.



WHY WARCRAFT III IS THE FUTURE OF GAMES...

- It's Warcraft II - but in 3D.
- And with three more races to play.
- And more units who gets shitty when you poke them.
- And extra roleplaying bits.

There can be only **ONE** winner.
MAKE SURE IT'S YOU!



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GAME***

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Non-stick rubber buttons for fast action, 8-way hat switch, sculpted stick for comfortable combat, radial throttle and a steel weighted base.



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GAMES***

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Exclusive I-Force feedback cable-drive system for greater realism, 6-way hat switch, nine programmable buttons.

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 F-15.**



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Logitech

Harvey Norman

*Product by redemption. See store for details.

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Real time strategy had no room for heroics.

PREPARE TO ENTER THE NEXT GENERATION OF REAL-TIME STRATEGY. HERE YOU'LL DEVELOP A HERO TO LEAD YOUR FORCES INTO BATTLE. SHARE YOUR ABILITIES AND SPELLS WITH SURROUNDING MEMBERS OF YOUR ARMY. AND DEVELOP YOUR HERO AS YOU EXPAND YOUR EMPIRE. BECAUSE WHAT'S THE FUN OF WINNING A BATTLE IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHO TO CARRY OFF ON YOUR SHOULDERS?

- COMBINE ELEMENTS OF REAL-TIME STRATEGY AND RPG IN THE FIRST HERO-BASED RTS EVER.
- BATTLES ARE LED BY UNIQUE MYSTICAL HEROES, NOT FACELESS ARMIES.
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FACE REALISTIC COMPETITION
THROUGH AI THAT DOESN'T CHEAT.



CAST OVER 90 UNIQUE MAGIC SPELLS
AND SHARE THEIR POWER WITH TROOPS
WITHIN YOUR COMMAND RADIUS.



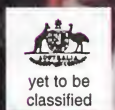
CHALLENGE UP TO FIVE OTHER
WARLORDS OVER THE INTERNET.

Until now.



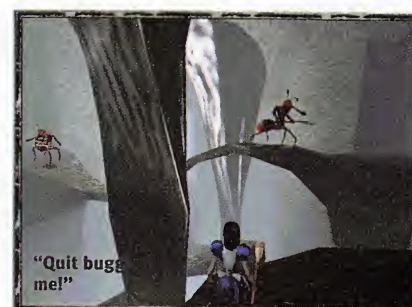
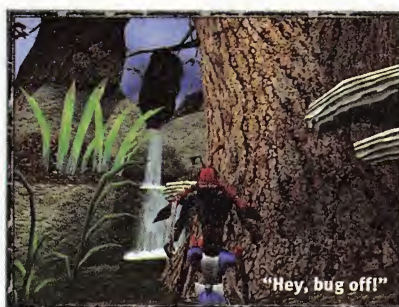
Windows © 95/98

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ALICE

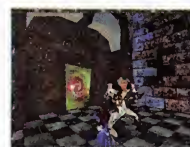
THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS WITH DOOM DESIGNER, AMERICAN MCGEE



DETAILS

- Genre: Action/Adventure
- Players: 1-Multi
- Developer: Rogue
- Publisher: Electronic Arts
- Due: 1st Qtr 2001

■ These new images of American McGee bizarre recreation of Lewis Carroll's fantasy world still leave plenty of questions unanswered.



I'M GOING IN

THE GAME FORMERLY KNOWN AS PROJECT IGI. WHICH NAME DO YOU PREFER?



DETAILS

- Genre: Action
- Players: 1
- Developer: Innerloop
- Publisher: Eidos
- Due: 4th Qtr 2000

■ To ensure IGI's realism, the team at Io apparently visited the snowy wastelands of Finland to test out the arsenal of weapons included in the game.

CRIMSON SKIES

AFTER B-17 II, HERE'S ANOTHER MERGING OF FLIGHT SIM AND ROLEPLAYING

DETAILS

■ Genre: Aerial Action/RPG

■ Players: ???

■ Developer: Zipper

■ Publisher: Microsoft

■ Due: 3rd Qtr 2000

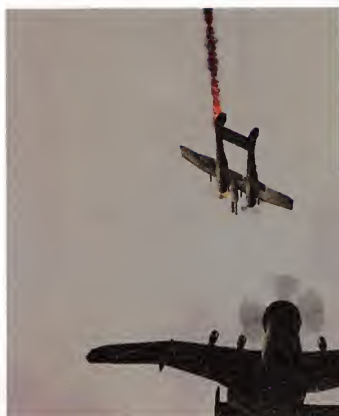
■ Zipper Interactive's alternate history action game was one of the surprise hits of E3. The game asks what might have happened if the Nazis had won.



Flying this low is not recommend. Unless you're about to land.



It's enough to make you dizzy.



Sky-writing with red vapour - what an innovation!

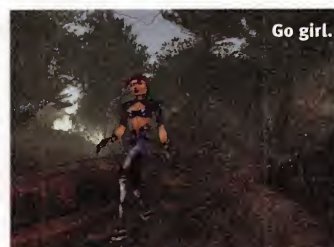


ANACHRONOX

A CONSOLE-ESQUE RPG ON THE PC? NO, SORRY, THAT'S ANACHRONISTIC...



Despite aging technology, the game boasts some stunning vistas.



Go girl.



DETAILS

■ Genre: RPG

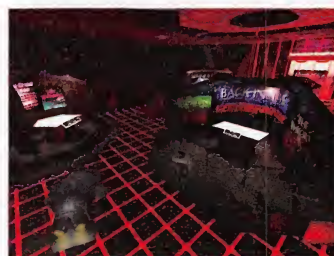
■ Players: 1

■ Developer: Ion Storm

■ Publisher: Eidos

■ Due: 3rd Qtr 2000

■ Built with the Quake 2 engine, this RPG borrows heavily from classic console adventures such as the legendary Chrono Trigger.



"Aaaarghh!"

REVIEW CONTENTS

Another fine month in PC games...

THE PCPP CREW AND THEIR PROSTHETIC DESIRES...



David Wildgoose

What I'm playing:

Deus Ex, Sacrifice, Musical Chairs

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

There's no need - we're all already cyborgs.



March Stepnik

What I'm playing:

Planescape: Torment

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

Facial hair glands. You can't have too much facial hair!



Brett Robinson

What I'm playing:

Deus Ex, Thief II, Dead Or Alive 2

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

My eyes. The ability to sleep with them open would be a godsend.



Major Des McNicholas

What I'm playing:

Allegiance, Jane's FA-18, Soldier of Fortune, Gunship!

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

Nothing - it's all big enough already!



Ryan Hovingh

What I'm playing:

Would you believe I have gone back to Might & Magic VI?

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

A longer snoz would provide advanced warning before my head hits the keyboard after some heavy review writing!



John Dewhurst

What I'm playing:

Planescape: Torment

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

Nano-augmentation, who needs it - the kid's perfect already!



Christian Read

What I'm playing:

Soulbringer, Legacy of Kain, your mother

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

My goddam personality.



Hugh Norton-Smith

What I'm playing:

Deus Ex

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

My rig. Guaranteed to terrify convent school girlfriends.



JC Denton

What I'm playing:

That's privileged information.

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

And, so's that.



Malcolm Campbell

What I'm playing:

Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

My eyes. No x-ray, infra-red, super-duper vision - I just want to see properly.



Ashley Millott

What I'm playing:

Tetris, Candy Crisis

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

My hair. Turbo styling!



Murray Philbrick

What I'm playing:

Deus Ex, Thief II, Soul Calibur

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

Torn between my left or right nostril.



Harry Maragos

What I'm playing:

Soldier Of Fortune

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

I wouldn't mind another bionic eye.



Edward Fox

What I'm playing:

GP500, AOE2, Virtual Pool Hall, Motocross Madness 2

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

Erm...



Mike Wilcox

What I'm playing:

Thief II, Star Trek: Armada, Imperium Galactica II

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

Incus bone.



Agata Budinska

What I'm playing:

Homeworld, Starcraft, Backgammon

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

My breasts, so I could shoot shit at everyone.



Elih Brading

What I'm playing:

NFS High Stakes, Quake 3, sarah@reception

Which body part would I have nano-augmented?

My Palmar Digital Nerve (for fierce, flick-rail reaction time.)



ISSUE 51 REVIEWS

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Hey, whaddya know, it ain't half bad.

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Like the first one - but with a 2. And a 3D.

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From the creators of Hidden & Dangerous.

82 Motocross Madness 2

Break your back, kids!

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Revolution? Oh yeah, it spins round...

88 Soulbringer

Roleplaying with a soul.

90 Dogs Of War

We preferred it as War Monkeys.

92 Round-up

Wild Wild West

Cricket 2000

UEFA Manager 2000

THE PCPP REVIEW SYSTEM

NEED: The bare minimum system requirements to get the game up and running at a playable speed. Don't even think about the game unless you have this system.

WANT: The ideal system requirements for the game. You can still play it well without this setup, but this will allow you to see the game as it was meant to be.

FOR: The major reasons why you'll like the reviewed game.
AGAINST: The major reasons why you won't. Read both and decide which seems the most appropriate and important to you.

95+ **PLATINUM AWARD**
 A virtually flawless title, one that expands our gaming horizons while providing a supremely playable experience. The absolute best there is. Everyone will love this game.

94-90 **GOLD AWARD**
 A classic. Either an unquestionable example of superiority within its genre or a groundbreaking title that will soon be setting trends.

89-80
 A strong title that's hard to fault. Eminently playable and likely to remain on the hard drive for some time. But perhaps not the best in its field.

79-60
 Competent and playable. A few gameplay flaws or unoriginality hold this game back from a higher rating. For fans of the genre.

59-40
 Decidedly average. Probably either full of bugs or lacking some crucial features. But, most of all, probably boring.

39-0
 A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.

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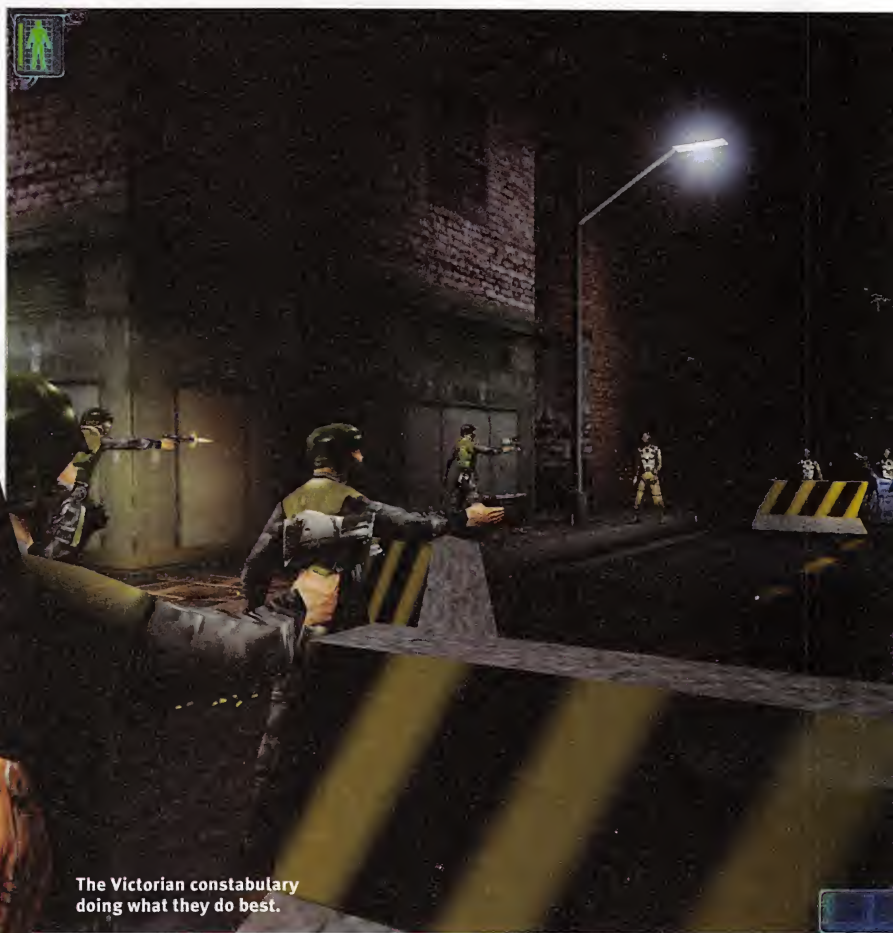


DEUS EX

WARNING! THIS IS A CLASSIFIED GOVERNMENT DOCUMENT. DUE TO ITS CONFIDENTIAL NATURE, SOME NAMES AND LOCATIONS HAVE BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT NATIONAL SECURITY.



JC Denton: Da man



The Victorian constabulary doing what they do best.

I've never restarted a game so many times. It's not that I keep dying - though this has happened on occasion, sometimes as a consequence of my own foolhardy actions, but more often as a result of being bested by the game's sheer cunning. And unlike some recent titles, it's not that I'm unable to save either - though such is the power this game has to hold the player in its thrall, there have been times when I've been too engrossed to remember the mundane necessity of saving. And I've paid the price for it, let me tell you.

To be honest, I've restarted Deus Ex so many times because I really don't know who I am any more. Sure, I know I've been cast in the role of JC Denton, a government agent who works for UNATCO, the United Nations Anti-Terrorist Coalition, and has been fitted with experimental cybernetic implants (thanks to the wonders of nanotechnology). But how do I play this role? Which JC Denton do I want to be?

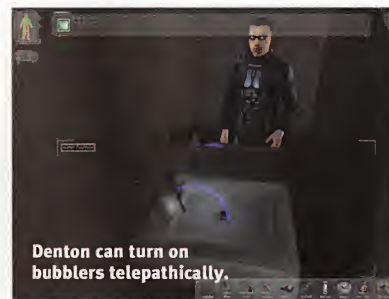
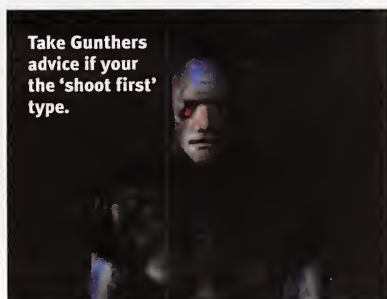
Am I the super-strong hand-to-hand combat specialist or the sniper expert, deadly with firearms from a distance?

The technician who can disable security systems in his sleep or the thief who relies on the convenience of a lockpick? The armour-clad fitness fanatic whose chest can survive a hail of bullets or the medic who can mend a broken leg with a handful of cigarette filters? The covert operative who likes the reassurance of a silencer or the demolitions guy who'll simply blow the place to smithereens? Or what about a combination of two or three of these? Aargh! I can't decide...

It's a dilemma

None of this is a problem - quite the opposite, in fact. Putting it mildly, Deus Ex gives you options. Actually, it practically encourages the emergence of some kind of multiple personality disorder in those who play it. And - surprise, surprise - this is the chief reason why it's such a brilliant game. Without spoiling anything for you, let me try to give an example:

There's a bit where Denton and his ("significant other" - Ed) are holed up in a hotel room when - right in the middle of an interactive dialogue sequence - ("the Mormons" - Ed) bash



down the door and set the room alight with gunfire. You have a mere matter of seconds to decide whether to stand your ground and fight or scramble out the window and flee down the fire escape. Essentially, then, this is a situation with one clear objective, but two radically different ways to accomplish it. And how about this one:

There's a bit at an underground ("resort" - Ed) in ("a major American city" - Ed) where Denton must get to the surface to rendezvous with his

negotiate along the way. There's a secured door ahead: do you use a lockpick or LAM grenade or do you search elsewhere for the key? Two guards stand sentry at a gate: do you try to fell both with a stealth pistol or risk attracting attention with a gas grenade? Dilemmas such as these occur at a constant rate throughout each mission. Add them all up and the result is a game that finally allows the player to do what he wants, a game that goes further than any other to remove those

augmentations introduce a roleplaying element. The physically demanding gunplay suggests a firstperson shooter, though the range of weapons and emphasis on stealth points toward something more tactical. Of course, in the end it's all of these - though the degree of each depends entirely on how you choose to play it. Ion Storm has coined a term for it, too: the immersive reality simulation.

The controls operate much like any firstperson action game: the keyboard allows foot movement, while the mouse simulates head movement. However, a slight difference arises with the function of the mouse buttons. Left- ▶

"...A GAME THAT FINALLY ALLOWS THE PLAYER TO DO WHAT HE WANTS..."

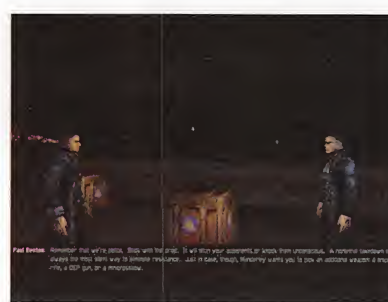
("Uncle Charlie" - Ed). He can take the direct route - an elevator that opens in the middle of the above ("bingo hall" - Ed) and pitches him immediately into a firefight. Or he can be more cautious and head through the sewers, eventually emerging outside the whole compound and given the added task of finding a way back inside.

And don't forget the countless minor incidents Denton must also

arbitrary barriers and restrictions that seem forever placed on a player's choice of action.

Road to freedom

To provide this kind of freedom, developer Ion Storm has had to create a game that straddles many a game genre. The lengthy conversations and dialogue options hint at an adventure game, while the skills and



tips

When creating your character at the beginning of the game, don't assign any skill points. Leave this until you've started the first mission and have a better understanding of what type of character you wish Denton to be. The AI characters react to any noise they hear, so monitor how much sound you make when moving. You can use this to your advantage as well - a well-aimed soda can is sometimes the only diversion you'll need to bypass an enemy.

DEUS EX

GIMME FREEDOM!

The UNATCO headquarters based on Liberty Island, New York, has been hijacked by a band of terrorists. They've commandeered the famous Statue and captured one of Denton's fellow agents. Your mission: subdue the terrorist leader and, if possible, rescue the hostage.

There are, by our count, at least a dozen different ways to complete this mission. Here are just three of them...

The Brute Force Approach



Arm yourself with the enormous GEP gun and wreak havoc. The gardener will be in in the morning to clean up the blood...

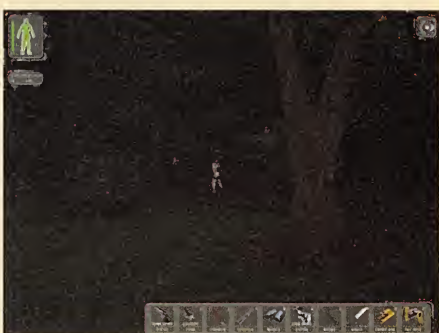


... as well as the shrapnel and debris left behind after you've evacuated the base with a few well-timed grenade attacks.



Finally, put a bullet through the terrorist leader's head - the traitorous scum - for good measure. The boss won't like it, but hey!

The Sneaky Covert Approach



If you're cautious, the various trees and packing crates can be used as effective cover to sneak past patrolling guards.



The rear entrance is well-disguised, but if you stick to the shadows - and drop guards with your baton - then it's simple to slip in.

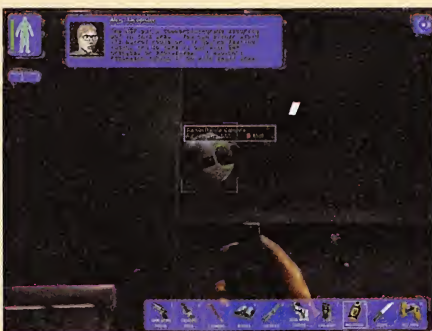


Take the terrorist leader by surprise and he'll surrender quickly. He's a wimp, really, but then so are you.

The Thinking Man's Approach



Rendezvous with your informant on the other side of the island. A skilled negotiator will relieve him of the key to the front door.



The front entrance is heavily secure. Don't worry, you can whip out your multitool and disable those troublesome cameras.



It's a bit of a detour, but if you free your colleague then he'll lend some assistance to complete the mission.

ROLE CALL: BLAH BLAH BLAH



JC Denton
You. One of the new breed of nanotechnological enhanced UNATCO agents. Never removes his dark shades.



Men In Black
Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones. At least you know that when they arrive, the shit has really hit the fan.



Joseph Manderley
Head of UNATCO. Sits at his desk all day and has his own private bathroom.



Gunther Hermann
UNATCO agent. Sounds like Arnie. Likes the heavy-handed approach.



Anna Navarre
UNATCO agent. Has mechanical implants and, as such, views nanotech agents like Denton with suspicion.



Paul Denton
UNATCO agent and your brother. Seems to have something to hide. Hmm...



Pigeon
Any bird of the family Columbidae, having a compact body and short legs. Pigeons rock!



clicking will use the item equipped in Denton's hands, whether it be a gun, a pair of binoculars or a can of soda. On the other hand (Groan... - Ed), right-clicking triggers an interaction with an object in the world, whether it be talking to someone, accessing a computer terminal or hitting a light switch.

One further small complexity is the inventory, which is divided into several areas detailing the equipment Denton is carrying, as well as his various skills and augmentations. A limited carrying capacity means decisions must be made over which items to keep and which to jettison; similarly, a limited allocation of skill points for completing objectives means only a few of the eleven skills will ever be mastered. The same goes for the augmentations, the exact nature of which is determined through a series of irreversible binary decisions throughout the course of the game. The choices made by each different player in all these aspects manifest themselves in the manner they will elect to overcome any given situation.

But the really clever thing about the

skill system is that every player is allowed to do everything, only those players who master a skill will do it better. Raising your skill level in Lockpicks, for example, means you can bypass a locked door more efficiently - that is, you'll use fewer lockpicks than an unskilled player. Likewise for the Rifle skill, where a skilled player's steadier hand boosts his accuracy - that is, the onscreen crosshair will be appreciably more erratic for the novice marksman. As for the augmentations, you might have to decide whether the augmentation fitted in Denton's eye, for instance, provides him with information on other characters or enables infra-red vision.

Deep and complex

All this extra complexity is there for a reason, though. It's absolutely necessary to do justice to the incredibly complex degree of world simulation that lies at the heart of the game. On one level, this is evident in the graphics; Deus Ex is not a game designed as eye candy. Instead, the Unreal engine has been tasked with the creation of a world



built with an emphasis on gritty realism. From the Statue of Liberty to the fetid depths of the canals of Hong Kong, from the interior of an enormous 747 to the abandoned New York subway, the game's locations are realised in uniformly exceptional detail. Complementing this is the bewildering and diverse array of objects with which Denton can interact. This is a world just buzzing with things to touch and fiddle around with (See Inspecting Gadgets).

On another level altogether is the complexity of the game's narrative. Remember why Half-Life and System Shock 2 (the two games Deus Ex most resembles, though you would need to

DEUS EX

INSPECTING GADGETS: COOL THINGS TO PLAY WITH IN DEUS EX

**COMPUTER**

Terminals can be accessed to read email and news reports. Can be hacked, too.

**SCANNER**

To enter UNATCO HQ, Denton must undergo retinal scanning each time. Very cool.

**WATERCOOLER**

Refresh yourself after a hard day's work. And, yes, it does restore your health.

**URINAL**

The mark of any quality game: a fully-functioning toilet facility.

**CANDY BAR**

Choose between soya chips and chocolate bars!

**ATM**

Withdraw cash from your account - or just hack into someone else's...

**POOLTABLE**

You can actually play a full game of pool. The physics leave a little to be desired, though.

**BASKETBALL**

Shoot some hoops on the mean streets of Hell's Kitchen, NY.

**SECURITY**

Reprogramme security cameras and defence turrets to aid your cause.

add Rogue Spear and Fallout to complete the picture) were great? Primarily it was due to the way events unfolded not just before your eyes, but all around you. Sure, there were plenty of scripted, non-interactive events, but the trick was to make the player feel implicated in every single one of them. The greater the seamlessness between interaction and non-interaction, the more powerful the immersion into the game world.

Deus Ex is brilliant for precisely the same reason. Almost every crucial incident happens in your presence: people get killed, firefights break out, important characters talk amongst themselves, helicopters take off and land, innocent civilians wander the streets while other shadier citizens pimp and deal drugs, and everyone generally does their damndest to convince you that Denton exists in a living, breathing world.

Stepping beyond

Yet Ion Storm has the audacity to take this one step further than any other developer. This is a virtual world that holds to the same principles of cause and effect as the real world. Denton's actions have consequences - and, more importantly, they matter. The manner in which you choose to complete each mission affects everything from the congratulatory messages from Denton's fellow agents to how his relationship develops with the game's main characters to even what he'll be asked to do on the next mission. Friendships and alliances are both made to be broken and forged anew as the narrative pirouettes through a gripping mix of corruption, conspiracy and deep-seated paranoia. The plot retains an intensity and credibility - beyond the predictable, hackneyed bollocks usually mustered

by even the best games - because it convinces the player that the course of action he or she chooses to take actually matters. In a word, it's immersive.

Clearly, if you like to be lead by the hand through a game - to have the route to the next objective signposted in bright neon - then Deus Ex is definitely not the game for you. However, if you want to be challenged - physically and mentally - to devise solutions to problems on-the-fly and then carry them through successfully in realtime, then I expect Deus Ex will offer the most satisfying test you'll encounter for a long time to come.

Deus Ex is a game all about choices. The only one it fails to give you, though, is the option of not playing it. I'm heading back to restart it once more, why don't you join me?

David Wildgoose

extra

The big picture of some really small technology.
www.nanoindustries.com



Pepper spray to the eyes really hurts.



A Hazmat suit is necessary in situations like this.

- Genre: Action/RPG ● Players: 1
- Developer: Ion Storm ● Publisher: Eidos ● Distributor: Ozisoft
- Price: \$89.95 ● Available: NOW ● Rating: M
- Need: PII-233, 23MB RAM ● Want: PII-400, 64MB RAM, 3D Videocard
- URL: www.deusex.com

PCPP

FOR: Incredibly immersive game world. Cracking story builds enormous tension and enables player freedom.
AGAINST: The only thing preventing a higher score is the thought that the rumoured sequel will be even better...


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Missions - Realistic missions, Fly with wingman and co-ordinate attacks, Radio in air and artillery support, Day, Night and all weather missions.

Campaigns - 3 large scale dynamic campaigns, Smaller scale 'skirmish' games, Detailed campaign interface, 3 game difficulty levels. Plus those of Apache Havoc if it's installed.

FIRST PICTURES



3D Engine - Specifically designed for low level helicopter combat, Supports 640x480 to 1600x1200 screen resolutions, Supports hardware transform and lighting.

Multiplayer - Internet, LAN, Serial, Modem.

Compatibility With 'Enemy Engaged: Apache Havoc - If Apache Havoc is installed then you can fly the Apache and Havoc gunships and Play the Apache Havoc campaigns.

The time for war IS over, here comes the real thing

by **LARRY STURGIS** War Correspondent:

Until now pilots training for combat have relied on a super realistic flight simulation, know as Enemy Engaged. This has; two fully simulated, fully armed helicopters US RAH_66 Comanche and Russian Ka-52 Hokum-B.

Cockpits - Highly detailed virtual cockpits - views include your co-pilot/gunner, Fly as pilot or gunner, Fully animated crew.

Flight Dynamics - Authentic flight dynamics accurately recreate the individual handling aspects of each helicopter, Configuration options available.

Systems - Precision avionics and displays, Novice and realistic avionics options, System damage, Authentic weapons, Hokum ejector seats.

Real Combat Areas -

Lebanon - The US step in to stop the production of weapons of mass destruction. **Taiwan** - The Chinese invasion.

Yemen - a border war with Saudi Arabia.

Real Terrain - Modelled on real digital maps with hills, trees and buildings to hide behind, Vast combat zones, Tactical installations (airfields, military bases, etc.), Strategic installations (power stations, oil refineries, etc.)



DARK REIGN 2

Exemplary AI and captivating gameplay sets this RTS apart from the crowd





■ The original Dark Reign was a competent and undeniably enjoyable 2D RTS. For those incensed by Command & Conquer's moronic Harvester drivers, Dark Reign's groundbreaking AI was an absolute godsend. An ability to set unit waypoints, and thus devise patrol routes for guard units, was equally well-received. The game was far from perfect, however. Less-than-stellar graphics, and an alarming tendency for the CPU-controlled enemy to unerringly construct bases in a checkerboard pattern of gun towers and

Following the precedent set by Westwood's Red Alert, Dark Reign 2 is actually the prequel to Dark Reign. Chronic pollution and rampant overpopulation have rendered 26th century Earth virtually uninhabitable, despite quantum advances in genetic and environmental engineering. The wealthy now live in sanitised domes, protected from the sun's carcinogenic UV radiation and segregated from the less affluent members of the human race. In the harsh and unforgiving environment outside of the domes, the Sprawlers (so called because they

benefit of the dome dwellers and, by association, the detriment of the Sprawlers. But the Sprawlers seek to end the JDA's reign of terror, and an all-out war between the two factions erupts with terrifying rapidity.

Precision camerawork

The game's interface, one of the most important elements of any strategy title, has been handled with aplomb. Games like Homeworld, Shogun and Ground Control boast impressively intuitive camera control systems, and Dark Reign 2 is no exception. Mere minutes of experimentation will have even the most technically inept players rapidly traversing the game's undulating terrain, rotating the camera and zooming it in to an altitude that affords a more detailed or strategically advantageous view of their units. The ease with which the camera can be manipulated takes any difficulty out of playing the game, and adds immeasurably to its visual appeal. The unit control panel, accessible on the right side of the screen, allows the player to select from a number of AI presets applicable to units. Simplistic orders like 'guard' may be issued, but more complex options grant the player extensive freedom in conditioning the

"AN ALL OUT WAR BETWEEN THE TWO FACTIONS ERUPTS WITH RAPIDITY"

power stations, saw the game's popularity wane. In the face of more innovative and visually spectacular titles like Total Annihilation and Age of Empires, Dark Reign languished and eventually faded into obscurity. At the same time, Brisbane developer, Auran, severed all ties with Activision and went on to work on yet another game engine, while Activision retained the rights to the Dark Reign license.

Fly Now!

inhabit the crumbling urban sprawl that surrounds the domes) struggle to survive. Maintaining order in this volatile era is the Jovian Detention Authority- a mega corporation that constantly transfers those deemed unworthy of living amongst 'civilised' society to Jupiter's moon, Io. There, the 'miscreants' are 'rehabilitated' through mandatory employment in various mines and industrial manufacturing plants. Obviously, this sort of sociological arrangement works to the

DARK REIGN 2



behaviour of their charges. It is possible to set a guard unit to selflessly defend a particular position to the death, pursue enemies until they retreat beyond line-of-sight or relentlessly pursue foes until one or both parties are destroyed. Likewise, it is possible to set assaulting units to hold their fire until the order is countermanded, return fire if attacked or fire at will. Restricting the circumstances under which units will

attack others has particular relevance to situations in which concealment and survival take precedence over enemy attrition.

Picturesque landscapes

Dark Reign 2's 3D terrain is, clearly, one of its biggest drawcards. With environments ranging from snow-capped mountain ranges to lush, tree-filled jungles, the mission locations are almost indescribably picturesque. The diverse range of units flawlessly superimposed over these landscapes serve only to increase the game's visual splendour. Those with high end systems will reap the benefits of Pandemic's graphical wizardry, but those with PC's whose specs lie a little closer to the minimum requirements will also be in for a treat, thanks to a feature known as MRM. Multi Resolution Mesh continually adjusts unit and terrain detail on the fly in order to maintain an acceptable framerate. Those waiting for Team Fortress 2's release will, no doubt, be intimately familiar with this much-

vaunted technique.

Along with spectacular weather effects like blinding snow and torrential rain, Dark Reign 2 boasts an impressively realistic day/night cycle which affects gameplay in several ways. At night, visibility is reduced dramatically, transforming combat into a distinctly close-range affair and all but negating the use of artillery. The JDA are also forced to rely on backup power sources, as their solar power plants are rendered useless with the onset of nightfall. However, there are some advantages to conducting operations under the cover of darkness. Covert, intelligence-gathering incursions into enemy territory have an increased probability of success, and a corresponding reduction in the likelihood of discovery. Large scale offensive operations against rival bases are also more likely to succeed at night, as swift attacks from out of the darkness create confusion and disarray amongst enemy personnel. It is even possible to mobilise large forces on the outskirts of bases during the night,





then launch a devastating attack at dawn.

As many players will eventually (and somewhat painfully) discover, Dark Reign 2 is one of the few games where the use of rush tactics will prove an ineffective means of subjugating any reasonably entrenched foe. Instead, successful annihilation of enemy strongholds requires much forethought and meticulous planning, as well as a competent management of resources and an ability to quickly prioritise targets. Though somewhat useful in tipping the odds in the player's favour when their forces are engaged in minor skirmishes, Mojos-special abilities that become available when requisite building upgrades have been performed- are especially useful during concerted assaults on enemy fortifications. It is then that Mojos can

towering golem who instantly puts the smack down on enemy units unfortunate enough to encounter it. In stark contrast to the more subdued nature of the 'Rage' Mojo, the JDA's 'Assault Bot Dropoff' unleashes a squad of assault robots who swiftly seek out enemy units and destroy them using explosive kamikaze attacks. And, possessing all the subtlety of a KKK rally through the centre of Harlem, the JDA's 'Tactical Nuke' vapourises any units and structures within a screen-sized radius from ground zero.

Multiplay innovations

Although the game's advanced AI makes it an exceptionally competent opponent in the two single player campaigns and Instant Action battles, very few games can come close to replicating the thrill of multiplayer

And Assault mode places an AI player in control of an enormous, well-defended base. The other players must attempt to infiltrate the base, leave a device within a predefined area, and escape to safety. Both these modes give players the opportunity to form alliances, and to betray each other in their pursuit of personal glory. In doing so, these modes also succeed in spicing up the somewhat dull domain of RTS deathmatches.

For those who play Dark Reign 2 like any other realtime strategy game and ignore many of the more subtle features, the experience will be enjoyable, but hardly mind-blowing. It is those who delve deeper, and discover the nuances and refinements of this delicately balanced game, that will find Dark Reign 2 infinitely more rewarding. Players with the time and patience to devote time to discovering these aspects of the game will find Dark Reign 2 to be one of the most compelling and enjoyable realtime strategy games ever.

Brett Robinson

"ONE OF THE MOST COMPELLING AND ENJOYABLE RTS GAMES EVER"

play a decisive role in the outcome of a battle. Austin Powers references aside, the Sprawlers' Mojos tend to have a more subtle, metaphysical effect on their surroundings, while the JDA's Mojos draw their power from the faction's technical prowess. The Sprawler 'Rage' Mojo transforms affected Sprawler units into berserkers who fight with drastically increased ferocity and skill. With an even greater potential for destruction is the 'Baron Samedi' Mojo, which summons a

engagements. Fortunately, Dark Reign 2 provides enough variety in this respect to keep even the most die hard fans occupied for months. In addition to standard battles involving the systematic destruction of rivals, two interesting new game styles have been included. Control Freak tasks one player with occupying a designated plot of land for a specific period of time, while the others attempt to wrest control of the hallowed real estate from that player and occupy it themselves.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Genre: RTS ● Players: 1-Multi ● Developer: Pandemic Studios ● Publisher: Activision ● Distributor: Activision ● Price: TBA ● Available: Now ● Rating: M ● Need: P233, 32MB RAM, 3D videocard ● Want: PII400, 128MB RAM, TNT2 videocard ● URL: www.activision.com/games/dr2/ 	
PCPP	FOR: Gorgeous visuals, an ultra intuitive interface and some welcome refinements to a stagnating genre.
	AGAINST: When night falls it can sometimes get a little too dark.

89

FLYING HEROES

Fluffy airborne action



Flying Heroes takes the first person shooter genre to the skies. In the mythical land of Hesperia, you can fly as a member of one of four different clans, in an attempt to become famous and hmmm.... oh who really cares? The story is as peripheral as the animated sequences of this action shooter. Fresh from the success of last year's Hidden & Dangerous, Illusion Softworks continue to present more mainstream palatable gaming in the form of Flying Heroes. It's obvious that this title was heavily influenced by the Quakes and Unreals of the world - and why not? If it ain't broke, don't fix, as they say. The twist offered here is flight. It's a convincing twist too - Flying Heroes is actually an incredibly fun game.

Magic carpet ride

Those familiar with FPS gaming need little to no introduction to the controls and mechanics of gameplay. There's the same mouse/keyboard combination, the same concept of collecting health and weapon items from the game field, etc. The visuals

"MAGIONS FLY ON MAGIC CARPETS, TEAPOTS AND LAMPS"

are fairly stunning and well suited to the mythical setting. While not up there with the above mentioned stars of the genre, Flying Heroes is certainly no slouch and is as pretty as a game needs to be when your aim is to kill your mates.

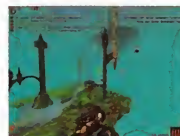
The four fighting nations that you can fly for are the Sky Knights, who ride Deboran birds; Magions, who fly on magic carpets, teapots and lamps; the Lizard Riders, fairly self explanatory and the Hammercraft, who pilot large airships. Quite a lot is made of the differences between the nations - from the weapons you use to the special moves available. Each camp have slightly different strengths, in regards



to speed/firepower/manoeuvrability but none are clearly at an advantage over the others, which is just what you want in this type of game.

In the career mode of play, you can upgrade your weapons and steed, with gold won from good performance in battle.

The control of your chariot-of-the-sky is very good. There's the easy method of forward/backward movement in the direction you're



cavernous levels. There aren't many different sized arenas either, useful in catering for two player duels in particular. There will apparently be support in the form of regular extra maps produced by Talonsoft for download from the web.

All up, Flying Heroes is a strong action title, with a few flaws, that will satisfy those with urges to fly and frag at the same time.

John Dewhurst

extra

www.nexilis.com/indworld/

This is a site dedicated to independent comics of all varieties - check out the interview with P. Bagge of Hate fame!



● Genre: Airborne FPS/Action ● Players: 1 - 6
● Developer: Pterodon/Illusion Softworks ● Publisher: Talonsoft
● Distributor: Jack of all Games ● Price: \$TBA ● Available: TBA ● Rating: G
● Need: Win95/98/2000, P200, 64MB RAM, 480MB HD ● Want: PII 300, 128MB RAM, 730MB HD (full install) ● URL: www.talonsoft.com/products/flyingheroes.html

PCPP

FOR: Great fun and a pleasing twist on FPS, good controls and lots of variety in play.

AGAINST: Maps are generally unsatisfying, the pace is a little more than moderate.

76

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Lara Croft & Tomb Raider 1,2,3, & Tomb Raider - the Last Revelation (c) Core Design.
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MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2

Bike action for those who don't take their racing too seriously.

tips

- Probably the most important skill to learn is the ability to land the bike without crashing. The technique I find best is to get the bikes landing angle parallel to that of the surface you're landing on. If coming in at an extreme angle, try to get the front wheels stronger, more flexible suspension to touch down slightly before the back.
- A great way to make extra cash whilst riding during the races on the pro circuit is to pull tricks over all the jumps that provide enough airtime. Each stunt pulled successfully pots anywhere from 50 to 2000 dollars into the players account.



What is it about dirt bike sims that make them so, well, arcadey? Don't get me wrong though, what we've had to play with so far have all been top notch and heaps of fun, just not realistic unfortunately. Microsoft, back in the days of its game developing virginity, demonstrated its prowess with the release of Motocross Madness, which apart from Moto Racer was the only dirt bike game



around. It did the job - in bucket loads!

Whilst immediately setting the standard for the genre, Motocross Madness offered almost all the elements of off-road carving that make it the jaw-dropping - not to mention jaw-breaking - sport that it is! The bridge towards that ever elusive genre of "simulation" has been crossed somewhat with the latest incarnation of the series, simply titled Motocross Madness 2. The stakes have been raised slightly in the graphics, physics and gameplay departments, and even though a worthy successor, it's really more of a version 1.5 than an outright genre buster.

Get some air

Anyone familiar with Motocross will be well aware that the average race format is not strictly traditional, and this has been lovingly filtered into Motocross Madness 2. The types of races included are: Baja, in which riders fly over open terrain to reach sequential checkpoints first; Stunt Quarry, which boasts large open environments with sharp changes in elevation - sik stuff for maximum glide time. My personal

fave is Endurance racing, which is in essence just a "chase the checkpoint" mode, though all tracks are set in various themed locations, from an English construction quarry littered with nasty, bone breaking construction vehicles, to an out of the way caravan park located on the outskirts of some American desert.

The ever-popular Nationals events have also made another appearance, and offer some of the most competitive action ever to come from the sport. There are, of course, the traditional supercross tracks generally located at indoor or even domed locations. Scooting around the Atlanta Supercross Arena, I was intrigued at how similar the place looked to a football stadium, then lo and behold, somewhere around turn ten lay the goalposts which were obviously not removed for the race!

Each location offers a varied ride in accordance with track surface. Mud scratching on ice is not a recommended occupation as, funnily enough, motorcycles don't have a terribly large amount of grip on the stuff! In addition to all these superlatives, Motocross Madness 2 offers realtime animation at all of its





EVIL KNEIVEL

Apart from simply racing, Motocross can also be an art form. The modern scene is chockers with amazingly talented riders, most of whom wouldn't think twice about flying along one of Utah's stunning deserts at over 150kph. Combine this speed with a sudden change in elevation and it makes for some real bus jumping action! For maximum points, and virtual chick points, the real heroes like to pull off one or two (and sometimes even three) stunts in one jump!



venues. These come in the shape of aircraft (which, if your timing is right can actually be used as leverage for the bike),

and that infamous invisible wall shoots you and the bike at a hundred miles an hour back into the map! I recommend this

"BIKERS STILL TAKE CORNERS LIKE SPEEDY GONZALEZ ON ACID!"

cars, buses and (yes all the motorcycle killing bastards are in there) gigantic semi trucks.

Acid sensitive

As was the case in the original, all the Motocross Madness 2 locations are surrounded by monstrous cliff faces designed to keep the riders contained right where they are. The obvious restriction of landscape size due to this aside, these vertical climbs make for some amazing stunt climbs; travel too far over the cliffs

be checked out during a replay, as it's one heck of a ride!

Though Motocross Madness claims to offer a new, fully updated physics engine, I wasn't half as impressed I originally expected to be. Sure, the gyroscopic forces exerted by the spinning rear wheel have found their way into the game engine, and I might add the effect seems very realistic. However, the overall feel of each bike is just a little unsatisfying. There appears to be little suspension movement in the forks or the swingarm, and what does

actually move doesn't seem to affect the performance of the bike. My major gripe, above all others, is the over-sensitive way in which the bike responds to control input when steering left or right. Even with the steering sensitivity set to its lowest level the bikes still take corners with the speed and agility of Speedy Gonzalez on acid! This one failing costs Motocross Madness as a simulation, and dearly in my eyes.

Super spaghetti

Probably the most profound feature of the game (and its predecessor) is the



CARV'N UP THE VIRTUAL HIGHWAY!

Microsoft has enjoyed immense success via its online gaming network, the zone. (www.zone.com) Through this medium, Microsoft offer a multiplayer meeting ground for online matchup with any of its, and other big developers (Microprose) titles. I did attempt to get into some online action during my tour of duty with Motocross Madness 2, but alas, as it turns out, my version of the game is only a Beta 2, and I was not able to connect to any online events! boo hoo :(

MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2



awesome stunts that can be pulled while catching air. Be warned however, the requirements for accurate timing have just increased dramatically. No longer do the riders land safely regardless of how fast or slow they are travelling. In order to take off, and then land the bike in one piece, your timing has to be good. Lose too much speed over a jump and the bike and rider will plummet earthwards at nasty speeds, crushing any hope of a smooth landing - along with every bone in your body. Conversely, too much pace when heading skyward and the intended landing target is nine times out of ten overshoot by a long way!

The bikes, as before, sport adjustable setups; suspension to gearing, practically everything can be modified in one way or another. And I feel, unlike in the first game, these changes actually reflect well on the way the bike performs. But sadly, no amount of adjustment could resolve the "Speedy Gonzalez" syndrome. A cool feature for MM2 is the incorporation of real-life dirt bikes. Along with the Honda XR250, CR600 and the popular YR250 Yammie, KTM makes an appearance, as does Kawasaki, albeit with a "no licence" friendly name of Kayasuki.

One problem many people, including myself encountered during our long hours



behind the original Motocross Madness was that getting lost became easy due to the lack of track maps. And trust me, you don't want to lose your bearings at any of the more complex supercross spaghetti circuits. To combat this, now included is a neat little transparent map in the top right corner display. The track map is clearly laid out, which should make learning the venues stacks easier than before.

Ghostly goodies

Up until now, I have neglected to mention the most exciting new feature of Motocross Madness 2 - introducing Pro Circuit Racing. This new mode of play sees riders competing in a kind of motocross career. Starting off on that rusty old 250 you picked up for next to nothing, competitors must win races, and in turn money, whilst avoiding those nasty fund-draining accidents. The more races and money won, the more sponsors and opportunities arise for the player. The bike can be updated to a larger (or smaller capacity) assuming you have the dinero to spend. The ultimate accolade of the Pro Circuit rider is the Supercross Championship of the USA, which takes place on a staggering number of tracks.

The final feature on this plate of two wheeled goodies is a comprehensive replay



GIMME SOME SKIN BROTHER!

Motocross Madness 2 incorporates the ability for any budding fans to design and use their own skins in the game! This trend goes for the bikes, riders and helmets for ALL the models included in the game. The skins images themselves are actually quite detailed, and when viewed in the game, slapped onto one of the accurate bike models, are really a site to behold.

feature. Players can now immediately, at any time, stop the action and get that personal perspective. You don't really appreciate the accurate rider animation until witnessed using a "TV" style camera angle. On the high resolutions with the graphic detail dialled up to full, the candy really starts to look gorgeous. Ghost laps may also be saved, and are a great tool for setting world records on the numerous Motocross Madness hot lap sites that are sure to spring up in the wake of the game's release.

Motocross Madness 2 will, based purely on the popularity of the original, be a huge hit, and with multiplayer support over the Microsoft Gaming Zone, we're sure to see it around for a long time to come.

Edward Fox

extra

www.usyd.edu.au
Visit the School of
Soil Science and get
the dirt on, well...
dirt!



- Genre: Dirt bike game ● Players: 1-10
- Developer: Rainbow Studios ● Publisher: Microsoft ● Distributor: Microsoft
- Price: TBA ● Available: Now ● Rating: G
- Need: PII-233, 64MB, 245MB HDD, 3D Videocard (D3D) ● Want: PIII-450, 128MB, 620MB HDD ● URL: www.microsoft.com/games/motocrossmadness2

PCPP

FOR: Looks great, multitude of options and game mode increase last ability dramatically.

AGAINST: Sickening quick, left/right steer is ultra unrealistic and shouts out "Arcade!"

85

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LEMMINGS REVOLUTION

You killed them all off ten years ago. Now they're staging a revolution so you can do it again!

tips

The pause key is your greatest weapon against the death of your little charges. Use it to scope out the map at the beginning of a new level, or to target an individual lemming for specific duties. Use the special abilities button, which can make Lemmings turn around - without the need for a blocker. If you're stuck on a level, just take a look at what abilities you've been given. Then take a look at how these might be used on the map. This is the second sequel guys, there's no secret tricks!!



Lemmings is one of those granddaddy of all game franchises that's been around a lifetime or two (if you consider that it first appeared on the Amiga?). Some might wonder what gives this game such longevity - certainly it has something to do with a simple concept that's done well. An original idea (well, some years ago anyway) that offers just enough brain-teasing, combined with a little violence at seeing your lemmings being squished, drowned and blown up - a Babylon of laughs to be sure. A problem presented by such a simple concept is how to make a fun sequel that isn't a retread - or is it? Lemmings Revolution is Psygnosis' latest romp



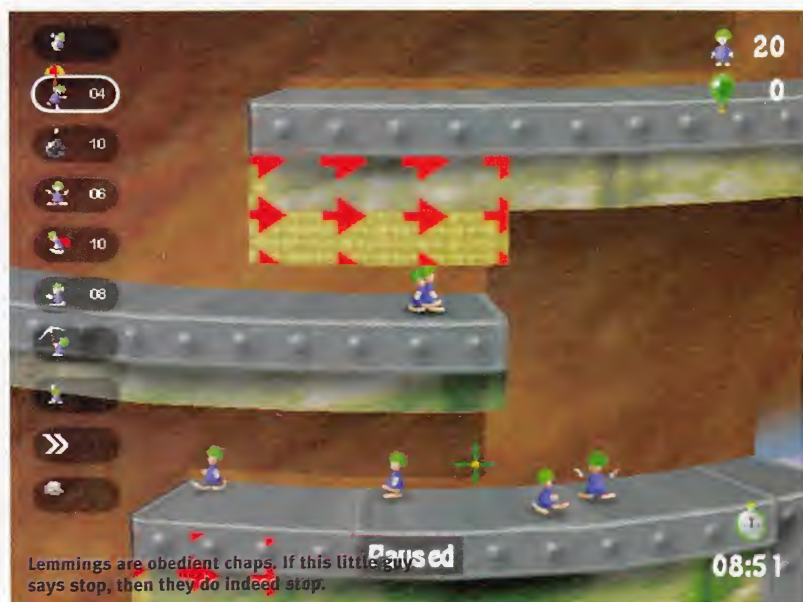
with those small guys and it's eerily familiar.

The Lemmings - having won through in Lemmings 2: Tribes - have been able to colonise all of ... um... Lemmingland. Anyway, just when you reach a happy ending, some nasty weasels turn up. These guys have decided that there's nothing better than watching Lemmings suffer by dying horribly. So naturally, they took the Lemmings prisoner and arranged some elaborate traps to loose the little guys in - for their own entertainment. Once you've recovered from the moral shock of all of this, take heart. You can help the poor little Lemmings get to their hot air balloons and escape! If

you have the patience, that is.

The whole idea is to manipulate a whole bunch of Lemmings so that they travel safely from their prison box to the waiting hot air balloon. With the use of particular abilities (digger, climber, floater), you can make your way through the harsh terrain in the hope of freeing the Lemmings. The challenge is due to the limited number of these abilities. By freeing enough of the Lemmings you can advance to a new level and so on and so forth.

The big selling point of this latest Lemmings game is the exciting new 3D game field! Well, don't get too excited. It's basically your same old flat field wrapped around a cylinder. This does



3D EH?

3D is a deceptive tag, isn't it? We've seen endless platformers (mostly on consoles) that feature 3D terrain but basically play in two dimensions. 3D seems to indicate a certain freedom in the game but most games are just as linear as their 2D counterparts. Well, Lemmings is no different.

The game is in three dimensions, yes, but the most exciting part of this added dimension is the artwork that surrounds the game field, since 3D has no effect on the game itself. What's more, you might find a pretty flower obscuring your view of the action, which can be just a little annoying.



offer a neat way to reach the end of a level easier but is a fairly cosmetic addition to the Lemmings experience.

One of the disappointing parts of Lemmings Revolution is the fact that there is almost no options for you to tinker with. Volume settings are the extent of the options menu. What about some different game speeds to mix up gameplay a little? Even a difficulty setting is quite reasonable. A small annoyance is the fact that you can't switch the direction of the rotation of the game field. You get



used to it fairly quickly, but it just isn't intuitive - you grab the cylinder and seem to turn it one way, but it goes the other. All of these factors help to make the game feel like a sloppy console conversion - even when it isn't.

But in the end, it's the quality of the levels that counts. There are dozens of levels in all and they range in difficulty from basic to downright unholy! In the pyramid-sideways design, the levels become available in varying orders and as such can be played a number of



GREEN ONES, BLUE ONES, WHITE ONES, ETC...

Lemmings come in a number of varieties. There are the famous, common, old Lemmings in blue that are susceptible to just about anything that isn't flat ground. There are also the blue and white Lemmings that can walk on water but suffer greatly when faced with lava. Lastly, there are the green Lemmings that are immune to acid.

All Lemmings suffer the ultimate fate when faced with great heights however. This is their driving instinct anyway, isn't it?

good successor to the family name.

There are some great ideas, especially in the combining of different kinds of lemmings - which produces new and unique problems to solve. I'm

"THE BIG SELLING POINT IS THE EXCITING NEW 3D GAME FIELD"

different ways through but there is no difference in them other than that. The tricky levels are suitably fiendish and in this way, Lemmings Revolution is a

happy to say that the same old feelings of desperation gripped me as I eyeballed the clock, hoping enough of my little critters would make it to safety in time. In this sense, Lemmings Revolution is a success. However the fancy additions to the game are just that, failing to make it better and mostly not getting in the way of the experience. It stands up on the quality of the original concept and brings little new to the experience.

John Dewhurst



extra

www.baselogic.com
Wanna be a lemming? Sounds like base jumping to me!



- Genre: Rodent Puzzler ● Players: 1
- Developer: Psygnosis & Take 2 ● Publisher: Take 2 ● Distributor: Jack of all games
- Price: TBA ● Available: Now ● Rating: G
- Need: Win95/98, P166, 32MB RAM
- Want: PII 300, 500MB HD, 64MB RAM, 8MB 3D accelerator ● URL: www.take2games.com

PCPP

FOR: Classic Lemmings action.

AGAINST: Some new features that add nothing to the game, repetitive and annoying music.

70

SOULBRINGER

There will one day be an RPG that doesn't have a plot about the apocalypse, we're sure. But, well, just not today...



Soulbringer returns Gothic horror to the world of the RPG with a bang. Tired of the whole goody elves and dwarves thang? Then much like the unstoppable Planescape: Torment, Soulbringer should give you more of that hardcore grown up roleplay fix.

Thousands of years before the game time starts, the world was ruled by six demon lords, led by their evil master Skorn. These Revenants defeated the heroes of the realm and generally committed all sorts of atrocities and horrors and dressed very poorly and beat up old women. Hell, even when they were killed they did nasty tricks like possessing the heroes who had iced them. But then Harbinger came along. Being all the more smarter than either

the aforementioned hero or demon he knew that he could not kill these primal foes. So he took their souls and threw them down the rather aptly named Well of Souls (and still avoided being sued by Indiana Jones). But these Revenants were beyond death and they waited for their chance to escape. Now, with Harbinger long dead, they are free to ravage the world again.

Thankfully, you - the lone peasant boy with the terrible mullet haircut - are here to stop Skorn and his scallywag pals. Collect the ancient items and you too can save the world!

Combo Combat

Soulbringer uses what is basically a 3D isometric view. It's top down, but the camera has a fair angle of rotation and motion, allowing a good look at the game world in its entirety. It's an interesting way to interface with a game world, even though it's perhaps a bit clumsy, making fine-tuning of the viewpoint sometimes difficult. But the world it reveals is richly dark, with lush weather, a grim post medieval European feel and liquidly animated characters. But it's not that which makes it playable. It's the overall feel. Much like, admittedly differing genres, Shadowman and Soul Reaver, the alien feel to the villains and monsters are what gives the game its spark.

Unlike, say, Diablo, the roleplaying part of the game is primarily what keeps you there. That and because the villains are worth fighting. It's not merely another mad god or horrible necromancer. It's evil itself and it's threatening enough to keep you stuck in your seat. And the fighting of them is always fun.

Combat is certainly worthy of additional scrutiny, if only to avoid the lazy comparisons that will be made between Soulbringer and Diablo. Yes, the interface is similar in manners but really that's where it ends. Soulbringer crafts an interesting and brutal fighting system based on a variety of moves. The three basic combat movements are cut, slash and low cut but there exists a way to create combos. Essentially, you can program in patterns of attack and then let them fly, just like a macro. It's less fun, but it certainly looks great, and adds to the tactical depth. The other groovy combat feature is the blood. Lots and lots and lots of it fly. A slash attack basically opens the throat of human attackers and a pleasant arterial spurting is produced. Even after death. It's not Mortal Kombat, but it certainly looks a treat and adds variety to each battle. Other weapons allow other moves and later acquired enchanted weapons promise plain devastation.

Magic is complex: spells draw upon





"SOULBRINGER IS BIG. VERY BIG"

a variety of elemental forces to provide you with a rather devastating advantage in combat over most human foes. But as many other creatures have magic, don't get too cocky.

Grim graphics

It should be noted that there seems to be some problems with the hardware acceleration. Playing the game using our bogstandard GeForce, it looks as if



Oversized spiders are a RPG prerequisite.



HAVE AT YOU!

The combat system in Soulbringer is quite unique, and certainly one of the more interesting around. When you are in a fight, it does not pay to sit on your ass waiting until something hacks you to pieces. Move around and look for more defensible positions. If two or more attackers have you surrounded, then move away. Make sure that you have some combos loaded up just so you can get a nice chain of attacks in before the bad guys cut you down like a dog.



extra

www.eliki.com/ancient/beliefs/medvmagic/

Ensure you have a good understanding of the world and the magic behind it all. When you have about 5000 years of history to absorb, you know that there will be some assumed knowledge. Soulbringer also uses a suitably arcane magic system. This site offers a bit of real world reading about the history of magical practices.



screen at sod all miles an hour that immersive gets annoying.

Overall, the game promises to be one to pick up if you are really a fan of the big RPG's with big plot and hours to waste. It's big, detailed, with lots to do and villains that are interesting enough to warrant large chunks of your life disappearing. The combat is cool, the graphics are gorgeous (besides the abovementioned fault), and the plot is intriguing. Epic as you could ever want, Soulbringer will excite the monster slaying problem solver in anyone.

Christian Read

- Genre: Brooding Grim RPG ● Players: 1
- Developer: Gremlin ● Publisher: Infogrames ● Distributor: Ozisoft
- Price: TBA ● Available: NOW ● Rating: M
- Need: P-200, 32MB RAM ● Want: PII-300, 64MB RAM, 3D Videocard
- URL: www.soulbringer-game.com

PCPP

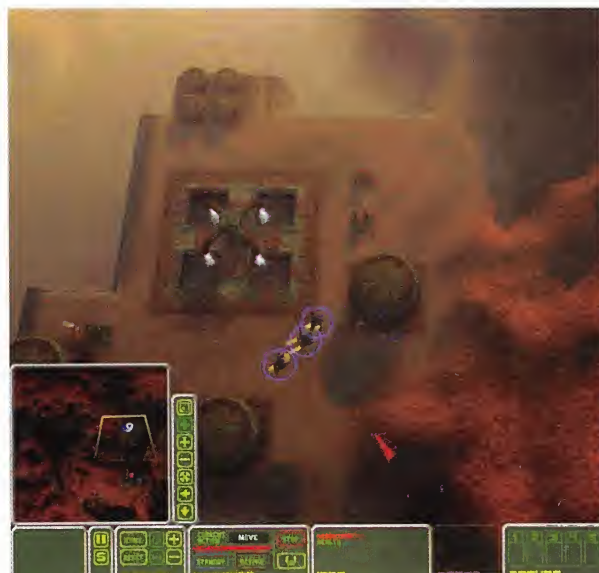
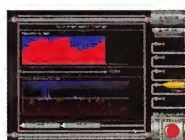
FOR: Detailed world, nice fighting, looks tasty, big nasty world ending plot.

AGAINST: Graphics need some improvement. Perhaps a bit too complicated for dive-in gaming.

80

DOGS OF WAR

Invest in mining companies now. It looks like we'll be fighting over minerals into the next century.



In what its makers are heralding as a new gaming genre, the crew at Silicon Dreams in the UK are billing their maiden offering into the 3D realtime strategy domain as an 'Action Tactics' title. They claim to have done this by combining a RTS style game with the pace and action of a 3D shooter. Interesting mix, yes! Revolutionary, I think not! However they do have a few clever cards up their sleeves.

The story behind Dogs Of War sees three factions - The Imperial Order, WarMonkeys, and The Mantai - all vying for control of the mineral-rich planet, Primus IV in the year 2161. It was some 40 years earlier that Earth's government commissioned a colony to be built there to mine a valuable silicon derivative, SLi8, from the mountains. These early settlers were initially successful in fighting off the planet's own reptilian indigenous life form called Mantai, despite the lack of military support from Earth. It was only when the government learned that the SLi8 they were mining had immense military value, as one of the hardest materials known to man, that they took

interest in Primus IV. But after years of low pay and poor working conditions (ring any bells for anyone?), the miners decided to take over the planet, declaring their independence from Earth and thereby controlling the supply of SLi8 themselves. The government's answer to this was to send in their Imperial Order troops, to make an example of the colonists. Learning of this plan, the colonists arranged some 'guns for hire' in the form of highly-trained mercenaries (aka WarMonkeys). Adding to the tension, the planet's own inhabitants, the Mantai have arisen from the beneath the surface to reclaim their land. What ensues is the ultimate battle for control.

Primate warfare?

From the outset, you have the choice of control over either The Imperial Order, or the WarMonkeys, and only once you've completed the game as both of the human factions can you choose to play as the indigenous race, the Mantai. As you'd expect, each side has unique units, requiring different battle tactics. The Imperial Order is the more

Hey, that's mine! Sorry...



Dogs of War takes the tactical approach to realtime strategy.



Fog of war closes in... thanks to the limitations of your videocard.



technologically advanced side, with advanced equipment, but fewer military numbers. They try to get as much intelligence as possible in order to take advantage of their technological superiority. The WarMonkeys are the opposite, and have inferior technology, but greater numbers. Their aim is to tactically overpower their opponents while somehow maintaining a proper defence. The Mantai use no technology, just their own natural defences. They have powerful mandibles, as well as some projectile

Players then assign troops to the applicable units in the staging area of the screen in readiness for battle. There are two types of units available, the default ones you're given and must use for the mission, and the units you may purchase from the armory.

Firstperson strategy

On entering a mission, players have full control to implement their own strategy for completing the mission. Viewing and moving around the 3D map

"SELECT UNITS AND SEE THE WORLD FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW"

weapons, and need to fight their battles up close and personal. In all there are twenty five single player missions available between the three groups, with a specifically designed training level at the start. There are also ten dedicated multi-player levels as well as the ability to use some of the maps from the single player game.

The mission briefings are extensive in detail and include sweeping views across each battlefield, highlighting available paths, various terrain types, possible waypoints and key objectives. Players then need to assemble their troops for battle, based on the requirements of the mission. The Barracks screen shows the available troops and their various ranking, which changes through the course of the game.

is made both simple and fast, yet essential for keeping track of enemy platoons, and positioning of 'friendly' units. While the 'Strategic' mode top-down view resembles your regular realtime strategy game, you're also able to zoom in and out freely and rotate your view to get a better angle on what's going on at ground level. But even more significant, you can select individual units and see the world from their point of view, with absolute control over their movements and actions, like a first-person shooter.

Multiple terrain types make up the battlefields including desert, snow and sprawling cities. Battles can take place with up to 200 individual units split between three opposing forces, across battlefields of up to 10 square kilometres.



RESOURCE POOR

Unlike typical RTS games, there are not the usual resource management options; instead, the primary focus is on strategy and action. While a player will have at their disposal as many as a hundred units to throw into combat, and over forty unit types, all care and caution needs to be taken in preserving those units. This is mainly because troops gain experience over time, becoming more lethal and efficient, making it all the more important to keep as many survivors from battle to battle.

However, especially early on in the game, the battles are more focused on smaller scenarios with fewer massive-damage units and more infantry. This is especially important, as you need to take your troops with you from scenario to scenario.

Graphically speaking, the game is sight to behold, with its highly detailed maps and unit designs, and one further point is the accuracy, in which the units have been designed in proportion to each other, adding an even more realistic feel to the game.

With the number of modern RTS games reaching close to saturation point, the split between the action-oriented and the more traditional RTS games widens as developers continue to search for the best gaming model, and the perfect mix of gameplay. With Dogs Of War sitting comfortably somewhere in the middle, its ability to offer the strategic elements of the old school, with fast-paced, arcade like control over individual units, gives players the best of both worlds. Add to that the stunning 3D environments, and its makers are right on track to providing the next level in the future of RTS gaming.

Mike Wilcox

extra

www.galacticimages.com
Check out some of the places you'll be visiting in Dogs of War.



- Genre: Tactical Action-Strategy ● Players: 1 - 8
- Developer: Silicon Dreams ● Publisher: TalonSoft/Take 2 ● Distributor: Jack of all Games
- Price: TBA ● Available: Now ● Rating: TBA
- Need: PII-266, 32MB RAM, 650MB HDD, 3D Videocard (D3D), DirectX 7 ● Want: PII-400, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D Videocard ● URL: www.sdreams.co.uk/warmonkeys/index.htm

PCPP

FOR: Sets a new course for realtime strategy - and mostly succeeds.

AGAINST: It's not called War Monkeys. Boo...!

81

CRICKET 2000

It's just not cricket. Oh, okay, it is.



First things first: I hate cricket. Loathe it. As a child, I was punished by spending whole summers dressed in ridiculous white clothing and getting burnt in the sun. That time I spent fantasising about growing up to be a chain-smoking alcoholic - which I now proudly am - left me with a profound distaste for the stupid game of hitting and running. So when I walked into the office

however you like.

The gameplay is quick, easy and yet remains challenging enough to maintain the interest for longer than a few minutes. Through either mouse or keypad interface, you pretty much rely on your own judgement to bowl and bat and field. It's basically a timing thing, but gets more complex as your skill at positioning the ball increases; you just make the

"THE BOREDOM OF CRICKET AS AN ENTITY GOT THROUGH TO ME"

to have the ghoulish face of David Wildgoose laughing maniacally while March was apparently somewhere over Singapore after catching the wrong plane back from E3 and able only to mutter "Barry White...winked!", I knew something was wrong. Of course, he handed me a copy of EA's Cricket 2000 and ordered me to begone while Black Monks flagellated themselves, chanting. (Flagellated does not mean what you think it means...)

In a spin

Suprisingly, even though I absolutely sucked at this game, I do have to say that it's not a bad bit of work. It has the usual EA dedication to complete and up-to-date data on international squad lists and statistics and even hairstyles. Everybody's here. Those Waugh people. Steve someone. You know them. I'm assured that it's all very proper anyway. World Championship play is available, as well as the one-off one-day matches. Customisable teams are available and camera angles can be played with

competition tighter. The addition of an Expert mode adds significantly to the longevity. It takes a bit of time to master, but once you have the overall moves down the tempo kicks into high and then the game takes off. Boasting the "Tru-Spin" bat and ball physics model, you'll be able to put real spin into your bowling repertoire which is a feature long denied the world of gaming cricket. The night games are a tasty touch, and the international grounds have a nicely international feel.

Unightly blotches

What lets Cricket 2000 down though is the graphics. While acceleration may be overkill on a piece like this, software rendering is hardly at this, well, primitive level. Who would have thought you'd need it? Blotchy and irritating, it really should have been given the once over at beta testing rather than make it through to the final package.

All good things come to an end, though. After a while, the boredom of cricket as an entity got through to me and



no amount of gameplay could make up for that. The game is mildly addicting and does a nice job of translating the experience of sport to lounging around like a fat bastard at your desk, but only you sport mad buggers will think it's a must have.

Christian Read



UEFA MANAGER 2000

Another challenger to Championship Manager's crown.

UEFA Manager 2000 is really three footy management games in one. As is traditional, "Career" mode is in and it has you starting from scratch with a lower division club. "Normal" is the easier option of the two, offering the choice of teams to manage. And lastly, "Scenario" play provides challenging what-if situations in which a goal of some type must be met to win.

There are nine top European leagues from which to choose a team. As a manager, players will see themselves dabbling in everything from the obvious training sessions, transfers and the actual matches, to catering, pitch advertising boards and fan clubs. The enormous complexity of this sim is not for everyone. So UEFA Manager 2K offers a neat "delegate" feature I'm sure we all wish we had in real life! This allows managers who are team and player orientated to leave the "other" less intriguing managerial tasks to his or her subordinates.

Hardcore gamers are in for a surprise. In what must be a first for the football management genre, UEFA M2K features

a relatively easy and uncomplicated user interface, giving the game a whole new feel. To aid in accomplishing daily tasks a neat email system is presented which keeps managers up to date with the internal and external goings on in the club.

Regarding the actual sport, most such titles offer little in the way of on-pitch action. UEFA stamps its dominancy on the genre again with a television display that offers all the action live, or, by managerial preference, simply the match highlights! This feature alone will do away with the dismal yawn factor that many of these games usually produce.

Speaking of, the best way to describe this genre, typically, is it being drab and functional. The job gets done and there is hardly any lack of depth to the gameplay. However, what's usually missing is a real sense of character. UEFA eliminates this conundrum somewhat by combining the anticipated depth with a sexy and slick interface, and functional gameplay. And did I mention that it's easy?

Edward Fox



WILD WILD WEST: THE STEEL ASSASSIN

The way the wild west once wasn't

Last year's Wild Wild West movie, starring Will Smith and Kevin Kline, has received more knocks than a saloon door. I, for one, liked it and I am willing to stick to my guns and meet any who disagree at high noon in the town square.

Wild Wild West: The Steel Assassin is the sequel to the not-quite-celebrated movie. Artemus Gordon and Jim West are back together again, rustling up the outlaws and keeping the local ladies happy. This time, they must protect President Grant from the professional attentions of a deadly assassin - the same one who reputedly murdered Abraham Lincoln!

For those not familiar with the movie, Jim West is a wisecracking, sharp-shooting cowboy with one eye on the horizon and one hand by his sidearm. Artemus Gordon, however, refuses to use guns, claiming that they are too simple and barbaric. Instead, he relies on his wits and his skills in sleuthing, disguise and invention. Obviously, this means that different strategies are employed during the

game, depending on which character you are currently playing.

Although Will Smith and Kevin Kline played no role in the game's production, the characters look and sound like their movie counterparts. Even the jokes are the same: Jim West walks into a chicken hatch and, amidst the cackle of the hens, says "Ladies please! I'm flattered - but you're fowl!"

Facing up to the challenge

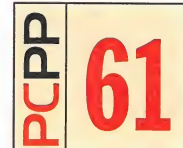
Despite being a western adventure, WWW is not a simple hog-shooting contest. Instead, the game is riddled with puzzles to get you more rattled than a snake in the summer. Some of the puzzles can be solved with simple logic while others are lengthy and rarely rewarding. I'd get a set of encyclopedia handy though - one of the crosswords requires the names of two little-known US presidents at the very beginning of the game!

The combat side to the game is a little more difficult and can be considered its only stumbling block. The constant reloading of weapons

makes the combat process somewhat stilted - a shortcut key to reload might have alleviated this process. Targeting is achieved through the use of a large reticule that reddens when over the target and shrinks to show that Jim is taking careful aim. This is most fun in the dark when Jim is armed with the night vision pistol!

The Steel Assassin is a fun adventure game with a great dialogue. Like most in the genre, it can get a little frustrating trying to get past some guards or discover the secrets to some of the puzzles.

Ryan Hovingh



SCORE LIST

THE PAST YEAR IN GAMING. THIS MONTH THE **BEST SPECIAL FORCES GAMES.**

GAME NAME SCORE ISSUE#

12 O'Clock High	68	#46
Abomination	81	#44
● Age of Empires 2	94	#42
Age of Wonders	84	#46
Airport Inc.	42	#48
Akuma: Demonspawn	50	#47
Allegiance	81	#50
Alpha Centauri: Alien X-fire	83	#45
Amerzone	68	#42
ANNO 1602	71	#40
Army Men Air Tactics	65	#50
Army Men In Space	66	#48
Asheron's Call	88	#50
Atlantis II	78	#50
BG: Sword Coast	76	#41
Battlecruiser 3000	72	#50
Battlezone 2	85	#48
Beetle Crazy Cup	74	#49
Boss Rally	05	#39
Braveheart	86	#42
Breakneck	86	#39
● C&C Tiberian Sun	94	#41
Castrol Superbikes 2000	85	#42
Civ: Test of Time	81	#41
Clans	48	#42

CODENAME: EAGLE

Developer: Refraction Games

Publisher: Take 2

Distributor: Jack of All Games

What we said then: "Average controls, average enemies - the action side of the game isn't completely successful for these reasons.

Codename: Eagle tries to do a lot of different things and doesn't end up doing any of them exceptionally. That is perhaps one of the most obvious pitfalls in the current trend of cross-bred game styles."

64% IN PCPP#46

Constructor: Street Wars	74	#39
Corsairs	65	#40
Croc 2	78	#48
Crusaders of Might & Magic	75	#50
Cutthroats	67	#43
Darkstone	68	#42

DELTA FORCE 2

Developer: Novalogic

Publisher: Novalogic

Distributor: EA

What we said then: "Delta Force 2 sounds great, and the new weather effects add a lot to the atmosphere of the game. Many missions rely on stealth, and the tension builds up quickly as you approach the objective. Plenty of equipment is available, and the treatment of special items such as satchel charges, laser designators and anti-armour weapons is particularly impressive."

78% IN PCPP#46

Descent 3: Mercenaries	65	#47
Dick Johnson V8 Challenge	45	#46
Disciples	81	#43
Discworld Noir	83	#39
Dracula	58	#47
Drakan	84	#43



Half-Life: Opposing Force



Delta Force 2



Hidden and Dangerous

Driver	71	#43
● Dungeon Keeper 2	90	#41
Eastern Front II	85	#39
Eidos Official F1	65	#39
● Enemy Engaged	91	#50
● Everquest	90	#39
● Episode 1 Racer	90	#39
Evolva	71	#50
F1 2000	65	#50
F22 Lightning 3	85	#40
● F/A 18 Hornet	91	#47
FA Prem. League Stars	71	#42
FIFA 2000	88	#45
Fighting Steel	80	#41
Final Fantasy VIII	77	#47
Fleet Command	89	#39
Flight Unlimited III	89	#43
Fly!	85	#42
● Force 21	90	#42
Force Commander	58	#49
Ford Racing	72	#48
Fox Sports NBA 2000	56	#44
● Freespace 2	95	#44
Gabriel Knight III	87	#44
Gorky 17	65	#47

● GP 500	96	#43
Grand Prix World	83	#49
Grand Theft Auto 2	84	#44
Guardians of Darkness	30	#41
Gulf War: Desert Hammer	55	#45
Gunship!	89	#50

HALF LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE

Developer: Gearbox

Publisher: Sierra

Distributor: Dataflow

What we said then: "Living up to the name that Half Life built was sure to be an almost impossible task, but Gearbox have come through with the goods - Opposing Force is simply outstanding. The mission pack reveals just that little bit more about the behind the scenes of the facility, while still leaving questions unanswered."

90% IN PCPP#45

● Heavy Gear II	93	#40
HOMM III: Armageddon's Blade	70	#45

HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS

Developer: Illusion Softworks

Publisher: Jack of All Games

Distributor: Jack of All Games

What we said then: "Hidden and Dangerous is a great combat strategy sim. With authentic situations and weaponry from the era, an interesting story and above all challenging gameplay, Hidden and Dangerous is great fun. It'd be an absolute must-have for combat fanatics and strategists alike, if not for a few minor design oversights."

88% IN PCPP#41

H & D: Fight for Freedom	45	#46
● Homeworld	95	#41
I-War: Defiance	72	#44
● Imperium Galactica 2	92	#46
Indiana Jones & Infernal Machine	69	#45
Interstate '82	60	#47
Invictus	51	#48
Jagged Alliance 2	89	#42
Jane's USAF	86	#44
KA-52 Alligator	65	#48
Kingpin	86	#41
Links 2000	79	#44
M25 Racer	25	#45
Madden NFL 2000	84	#44
Majesty	79	#49
Man of War II	15	#40
Martian Gothic	57	#50
● Mechwarrior 3	91	#39
Messiah	89	#48
Midtown Madness	89	#40

● Mig Alley	92	#42
Might & Magic VII	70	#40
Might & Magic VIII	55	#49
Mike Stewart's Pro Bodyboarding	34	#40
Millennium Racer	70	#50
MS Flight Sim 2000	84	#44
NASCAR 3	89	#44
Nascar Revolution	35	#48
Nascar Road Racing	28	#41
Nations: Fighter Command	82	#44
NBA Inside Drive 2000	68	#46
NBA Live 2000	90	#45
Need for Speed: High Stakes	89	#41
Nerf Arena	70	#46
NHL Championship 2000	78	#46
Nocturne	79	#46
Nox	83	#48
● Omikron: Nomad Soul	93	#44
Operation Art of War 2	84	#42
Outcast	59	#40
Pandora's Box	68	#47
Panzer Elite	85	#46
● Planescape: Torment	91	#46
Pharaoh	88	#45
Phoenix	64	#46
Prince of Persia 3D	65	#43
Pro Pinball: Fantastic Journey	88	#47
Puma Street Soccer	75	#46
● Quake III: Arena	93	#45
● Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear	92	#44
Rally Championship 2000	88	#45
Rally Masters	89	#50
Rayman 2	89	#45
Re-Volt	82	#41
Revenant	82	#45
Rising Sun	82	#48

ROGUE SPEAR

Developer: Red Storm Entertainment

Publisher: Red Storm Entertainment

Distributor: Jack of All Games

What we said then: "Rogue Spear is chock-full of new and exciting ways to kill terrorists, or Tangos. Sniper rifles have been introduced and the operation of all weapons have been made more realistic. Even heartbeat sensors have been introduced to provide early warning..."

● **92% IN PCPP#44**

Rollcage II	80	#50
R'coaster Tyc: Added Attractions	81	#45
Saga: Rage of the Vikings	42	#40
Sega Rally 2	68	#41
Septerra Core	84	#47
Seven Kingdoms 2	86	#44

SHADOW COMPANY

Developer: Sinister Games

Publisher: Ubisoft

Distributor: Ubisoft

What we said then: "Shadow Company has great characters and solid action. If you want to do some snooping (and the game requires this), you'll need to have someone with excellent stealth and infiltration skills. The same goes for weaponry as well. It's rather pointless giving a heavy weapon to someone who can't use it."

74% IN PCPP#44



Rogue Spear



SWAT 3

Shadow Watch	65	#49
Shadow Man	61	#41
● Shogun: Total War	92	#50
● The Sims	90	#47
Skydive!	12	#42
Slave Zero	55	#47
Soldier of Fortune	86	#49
Soul Reaver: Legacy Of Kain	81	#43
South Park Rally	41	#47

SPEC OPS 2

Developer: Zombie Studios

Publisher: Talonsoft

Distributor: Jack of All games

What we said then: "Spec Ops 2 offers some improvements on the original, but it could (and should) have been so much more. Old hands will probably be disappointed with this missed opportunity, while new players will compare it unfavourably with the alternatives."

60% IN PCPP#46

Speed Demons	55	#47
● Sports Car GT	90	#40

● Starlancer	93	#49
● Star Trek: BOTF	90	#39
Star Trek: Armada	56	#49
Star Trek: Hidden Evil	69	#46
Star Trek: Starfleet Command	87	#43
SU-27 Flanker 2.0	83	#44
Superbike 2000	89	#49

SWAT 3

Developer: Sierra Studios

Publisher: Sierra Studios

Distributor: Dataflow

What we said then: "In SWAT 3, players can ruthlessly kill every suspect, shoot only those who pose a threat, or even subdue and arrest every possible suspect using a savvy combination of intimidation, negotiation and CS gas. This high degree of flexibility elevates SWAT 3 high above the competition in both the realism and enjoyment stakes."

● **90% IN PCPP#46**

● System Shock 2	98	#42
Theocracy	76	#49
The Phantom Menace	76	#39
The Wheel of Time	84	#45
● Thief Gold	96	#45
● Thief II	95	#49
Theme Park World	80	#45
Thrust, Twist & Turn	30	#39
Total Annihilation: Kingdoms	84	#40
Tiger Woods 2000	84	#49
Tomb Raider: Last Revelation	89	#43
Traitor's Gate	78	#44
Ultima Online	68	#48

Ultima IX: Ascension	70	#45
Unreal: Return to Na Pali	72	#41
● Unreal Tournament	94	#45
Urban Chaos	85	#46
World Manager	34	#48

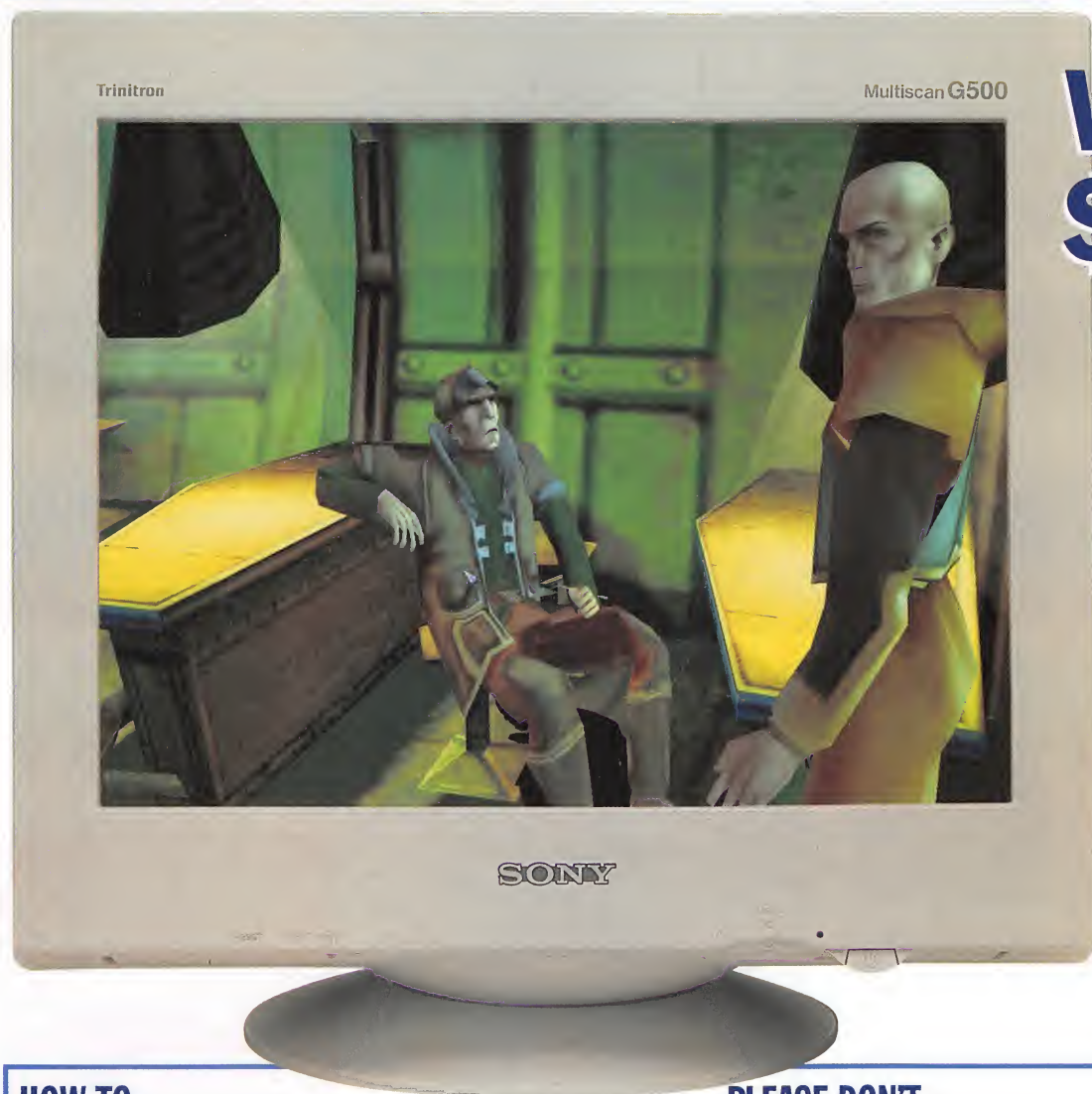
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THIEF II: The Metal Age

PLAYGUIDE

ENVELOPED IN DARKNESS, **MURRAY PHILBRICK** LIES IN WAIT, BOW AT THE READY...

As Garrett, you are a thief of amazing ability. That certainly doesn't help you if you don't use them properly, though. There are several main things to keep in mind while slinking around in the shadows of Thief II:

No Running In The Halls!

What you were taught in primary school about running inside or around corners will serve you well here. Walking is by far the most preferred method of getting around as a thief, simply because the noise made is a lot less. In fact, there are really only two times you should run: when trying to get to a new patch of shadows in a hurry, or when trying to sneak up behind someone.

Even then, try to keep it down to only a few steps at a time. Any more than that and your footsteps can really begin to get noticeably loud.

Shadows Are Your Friend

While it's a bit of a no-brainer, staying in shadows really is the key to getting through the missions in one piece. Even marginal shadows are better than none at all, though you have to be wary of moving too quickly through them as it makes you more likely to be spotted. One other thing to note is that you should try to stick to shadows away from guard or civilian's likely walking paths. If they bump into you, shadows are hardly going to convince them Garrett's

not there. Sometimes the only real point where shadows can conceal you in a room are in its centre, though, so make sure it's not smack-bang in the middle of a guard's walking route. Even hiding behind a non-shadowed object is better than being walked into by a guard. In situations like this, don't be afraid to make use of Garrett's water arrows. They're there to be used!

"Go! Recon!"

For the love of god, go slowly! Thief II truly does not reward those with the guts to go leaping into a room with their sword swinging. When possible, simply find a nice spot in the shadows from which you can look around a little first. Plan a route from point A to point B in



your mind, using as many shadows as you possibly can. Don't forget that you can lean up against doors and listen to what's on the far side, or lean into a room to take a peek. Later on you also have access to scouting globes... try to use them only when necessary, but when nothing else will do,

SURPRISE!

It is actually possible, on occasion, to leap out of the shadows and knock even a sturdy guard out with your blackjack from the front... even when he's in the middle of calling out an alarm!

they're amazingly good at their job.

As a thief, it'll generally be in your best interest if you only knock people out rather than kill them outright. Guards tend to want to tear you a new one a lot more if you go around killing people (oddly enough), so stick to blackjacking where you can. On expert mode, though, killing someone will actually lose you the mission in a lot of cases, so if you're planning on working your way up to expert try to keep to blackjacking on the easier settings, too. Practice makes perfect.

Sound is a very important part of Thief II. Keep your ears open at all times, simply because some guards have a nasty habit of walking 'round a corner behind you just as you're pilfering the coins from his unconscious counterpart. It can tell you if there's anyone behind a closed door, if anyone's nearby, or, obviously, if you're making too much noise yourself. Take note!

The Thief's Toolbox

Don't be afraid to use Garrett's various tools of the trade. They're certainly in short supply and can be expensive to replace, but they're there to save your neck. Hoarding treasure is fine, but hoarding water arrows doesn't earn you any bonus when the game's over, so use them!

Sword

You're a thief, not a warrior. Nonetheless, carrying this with you at



all times provides a little added security for those moments when bumping into a guard is unavoidable. It's also the only weapon you have that can be used to block an incoming blow from a guard's sword. One thing to bear in mind, though, is that you'll be more visible with your sword drawn; the polished metal reflects light.

Blackjack

While at later levels this becomes all but useless against guards (who start wandering around in heavy helmets, the gits), the blackjack should be your weapon of choice in most situations before that. Essentially a small but heavy club wrapped in soft leather, the blackjack is both silent and non-reflective, making it an ideal stealth weapon. It can also be used to duff up a guard with a repeated flurry of small blows about the head and shoulders til they collapse from boredom, though I wouldn't recommend you try it as a matter of course.

Broadhead Arrow

Broadheaded arrows are what you should use for standard sniping at opponents, preferably from the shadows and when they least expect it. The arrow will fly in an arc, so for longer shots you'll have to adjust your aim upward in the hope of hitting your target. Note that you can often salvage used arrows if you're quick enough, and guards armed with bows will more often than not offer you up a replacement arrows for your troubles. One shot to the head on an unsuspecting foe will usually kill them instantly; alerted opponents can take more (though keep aiming for the head, regardless, as it does more damage).

Water Arrow

A non-lethal arrow, this particular variety has only one main purpose: extinguishing fires. Using it, you can put out most gas fires and torches. They are also your only true way of defeating any mechanised opponents (by firing them into their



RECYCLING

Don't forget to retrieve re-useable objects. Certain types of arrows (particularly rope or vine arrows) and your scouting orb, in particular, can be quite hard to come by and valuable. Don't leave them behind!



furnaces). One final (though perhaps somewhat wasteful) use they can have is to wash away any spilled blood from an unfortunate encounter.

Fire Arrow

The most powerful offensive weapon available to you, the fire arrow is both powerful and deadly. When it hits, it erupts in a loud and fiery blast that engulfs all nearby. This, of course, is somewhat detrimental to the whole "sneaky sneaky steal" thing you have going, so be sure you can afford to make so much noise when using them. In fact, even having the arrow cocked in your bow leaves a fairly obvious light source for guards to spot, so you'll

want to be both quick and accurate in their use.

Moss Arrow

While you're amazingly good at moving silently, tiles or metal floors will nonetheless make you louder than... uh... something quite loud indeed! (Murray, master of the metaphor... - Ed.) For those moments where you need to traverse such a floor in absolute silence, these arrows will spread a thick layer of moss over the floor that will allow you to do so with no added bother.

Gas Arrow

This somewhat rare arrow type will shatter on impact, releasing a cloud of knockout gas that will floor anyone within its vicinity. If you get too close to it yourself you

will still feel its effects, although it won't make you land face-first onto the floor, either. Regardless, though, keep away if you can.

Rope Arrow

Able to be shot into wooden surfaces, these arrows will extend a climbable rope down to the floor that will allow you to get over an otherwise impassable obstacle. Note that these can be retrieved and re-used.

Vine Arrow

Similar to a rope arrow, the vine arrow can be shot into either wooden or metallic surfaces, from where it will lower a climbable creeping vine down to you. They can also be retrieved and re-used.

Noisemaker Arrow

When fired, this arrow will emit a loud rattling sound that will often draw guards near enough to it from their posts.

Flash Bomb

Essentially a small

grenade, the flash bomb creates a blinding flash of light that will send any foes looking at it reeling, leaving them open for a quick blackjacking to the back of the head. Try not to be looking directly at it yourself, though, as you can easily be blinded by it too.

Explosive Mine

A mine that detonates in a large and loud explosion, it is triggered by nearby movement (including your own). Be sure you know what you're doing before planting one of these. They can be very effective against mechanised opponents, and you should also keep in mind that you can actually disarm them using your lockpicks if necessary, or trigger them with a well-placed arrow.

Gas Mine

A variant of the standard mine, this one releases a cloud of knockout gas when triggered rather than a violent explosion.

Flash Mine

The flash mine, like the other two, is proximity-based, and will explode in a blinding flash of light similar to the standard flash bomb when triggered.

Explosive Devices

Quite rare, these explosives are extremely powerful and extremely wide-ranging. They also come in an even more powerful "sunburst" variety.

Frogbeast Eggs

These eggs will hatch a small amphibious creature that scurries about until approached. It will then explode, causing a small amount of damage to anyone nearby.

Flares

A source of short-lived light, flares should only be used when you absolutely need to see the area around you in a hurry. Don't forget, it will light you up as well as the room, so take care using them.

Healing Potion

After being wounded in battle, downing a healing potion will slowly restore your health. Try to find a safe spot in the shadows to drink it and wait for the full effects to be over with before moving off again.

Air Potion

Basically a bottle of air,

USING TERRAIN

While it's something of a dirty trick, using your opponent's limitations against them can be a lifesaver, particularly when faced with sword-wielding opposition. Jumping, climbing, swimming, or ducking are things most of your opponents simply can't do, so don't be afraid to use that against them in a pinch.

RUN LIKE A MANIAC!

When all else fails, simply running away and frequently close to various objects and shadows can save your neck and make your opponents lose sight of you. And bear in mind that those with only melee weapons simply won't have time to swing at you while you run.

this will come in handy for those times you need to go for long underwater jaunts. One use of this and your lungs will be filled with air once again.

Speed Potion

A "performance enhancing drug", speed potions allow you to move extremely quickly for a very short period of time, whether to make a longer leap or to simply escape a horde of furious guards.

Slowfall Potion

When faces with a harmful (if not fatal) but

necessary drop from a great height, a slowfall potion will temporarily weaken gravity's hold on you and allow you to float harmlessly downwards.

Invisibility Potion

Leaving you totally invisible for a short period of time, the invisibility potion still won't mask the sound of your footsteps. Also, should you attack someone you will instantly become visible again.

Compass

Together with the map, your compass will be your main method of figuring out just where the hell you are at any given moment... though if you've been paying absolutely no attention anyway, don't expect it to help you overly much.

Map

Although not every area you venture into will have an available map, be sure to use the ones you have, and use them often. Knowing where you are can cut down unnecessary risks and travel time, or

show you an alternate route to an otherwise impossible to reach area.

Mechanical Eye

Though you've lost one of your eyes, you've been able to have a mechanical replacement crafted. This can be used to zoom in on different places around you from the safety of the shadows.

Scouting Orb

A re-useable item, the scouting orb is a small video camera that works in conjunction with your mechanical eye. Throwing it into a room or around the corner can give you a clear view of the goings-on in an otherwise impossible-to-see place. Bear in mind that you'll have to physically retrieve the orb if you want to re-use it.

Lockpicks

Not to be underestimated, Garrett's lockpicks can prove amazingly useful from time to time. They have a tendency to make some noise, however, and some locks are so well crafted



that nothing short of the actual key will do the job.

Parchment

Often available in the pre-mission store, these pieces of parchment present information

for a price. This information usually leads to a secret area, or at the very least a difficult to access one, though sometimes they will be more relevant to your main goal. ■

ROGUE'S GALLERY

As Garrett, you'll come across many seedy (and, more rarely, not-so-seedy) characters in your adventures. Some of them won't truly affect the actual missions while you're playing, but a lot of them you'll encounter as a matter of course on your travels.

Civilians

They won't try to harm you directly, but more often than not they'll call for help and alert someone with a big shiny sword to your presence, which is far more dangerous. As a thief, though, killing innocent bystanders is a most definite no-no, so try to refrain from doing so (especially as you can still knock them out with a single blow to the head at all times, more often than not).

Guards

Not exactly the sharpest knives in the drawer, standard guards tend to be both slow and, for the most part, quite stupid. Armed with either bows or



swords, they are generally found guarding valuables in private residences or businesses. There are also Mechanist and Hammerite guards, both of whom are slightly more agile and quick-witted than their standard counterparts.

Police

Sheriff Truart's men, these guys are under specific instructions to arrest (if not outright kill) Garrett if they see him. They're essentially faster and smarter versions of standard guards.

Thieves

Somewhat jealous of Garrett's skills, these are fairly poor opponents for you. They don't like Garrett at all, but they're still too spineless to truly do anything about it, and they're quite simple to get rid of.

Watchers

Basically a security camera, these Mechanist inventions won't harm you directly. They will, however, set off an alarm or a mechanised turret face if they spot you, so keep out of their sight if at all possible.



The Undead

While nowhere near as prevalent in Thief II, the undead still do show up from time to time. What's more, Garrett has no holy water available to him to make dealing with them easier this time around.

Zombies will still get up after you knock them down, and haunts are still tough to deal with. Try to avoid them both if at all possible.



Tree Beasts

In the Pagan forest, these creatures can only be harmed by fire arrows. Generally, though, they're harmful enough that you'll simply want to give them a wide berth.

Apemen

With amazingly good hearing, these inhabitants of the pagan village can be quite difficult to sneak up on and knock out. Flash bombs and your blackjack can be particularly effective against them.





The Oracle

HEADLINES: Thief II Playguide • And of course the Great Bearded One

CODE

Force Commander

Access all missions:
Start a new game with the character name **TheWorldIsYours** then double-click it to access all missions.

Note: You will have to start a new game every time you want to use this cheat.

Extra Command Points:
Start a new game with the character name **TheGalaxyIsYours** then press **M** during gameplay to get 500 Command Points.

Note: This cheat only works with version 1.1 of the game.

Majesty

Hit Enter and type in the following codes to enable the corresponding cheats:

FILL THIS BAG
add 10,000 gold
BUILD ANYTHING
all buildings
REVELATION
reveal map
CHEEZY TOWERS
no spell range
GIVE ME POWER
all spells
RESTORATION
full health
NOW YOU DIE
lose game
VICTORY IS MINE
win game
FRAME IT
show frame rate

The Oracle is a Wisdom Dispensing Service. He cannot abide cheaters. Write to him at:
Oracle
PC PowerPlay
Level 6 418a Elizabeth St.
Surry Hills, NSW 2010
oracle@pcpowerplay.next.com

Army Men

Q> I am working my way through Army Men. However, I have reached the Flotsam and Jetsam mission in the Alpine section and can't work out how to complete it. The mission is to rescue a wounded man who is located on the other side of some water which my Sarge cannot apparently cross. Even when I've wiped out all the bad guys, the wounded man (and stretcher bearers) make no attempt to move and I can't reach them. I wonder if you are able to help me out.

Ben van der Klip, Email



A> I am usually loath to give aid to such mild brain teaser - the title of the mission contains the missing link - but verily you are a humble and honourable petitioner, so instruction follows. You'll notice that some way north of your "great divide", there is an old bridge. If the

connecting sections on either side of the bridge are destroyed, the central part will float down and provide a means for Sarge to reach your wounded man. Here endeth the lesson.

RollerCoaster Tycoon

Q> I'm really stuck man! My work hasn't been too good on Trinity Islands and I was wondering if you could give me a helping hand with some cheats.

Chris Testrow, QLD

A> Coward! Scoundrel! I can see nothing in your pursuits if it is cheats that you seek - I might bestow a kernel of knowledge for your aid however. Wasted on the likes of you, no doubt. Parks such as these are troublesome because you're restricted for space. A neat trick that I've found useful in such situations is to build two

levels of park on top of one another. So you have a medium sized rollercoaster on the ground and by raising a certain square to a large height, build a smaller ride on top. As long as your paths work out, this can almost double the size of your park. But really, the best way to overcome this is to build very efficient, entertaining and clean parks. I would wager my beard that you don't have even one cleaner in your park... begone I say!

Planescape: Torment

Q> My friend told me that in the Modron Cube there is a secret character. I've beaten all of the robots in all of the rooms and can't find them anyway. Where is this PC?

Athy Sterling, VIC

A> Yes you hear true, there is another Player Character



in the Modron Cube. Obviously, you are completely ignorant of the fact that there are a number of settings for the Cube. You can talk to the modrons, in the room just south of your first entrance. Offer to take the place of the director and you'll be able to affect the maze. You'll be able to generate mazes at three settings: easy, normal and hard. Set to hard and get ready to fight! Sooner your later you will find someone INTERESTING...

Planescape: Torment

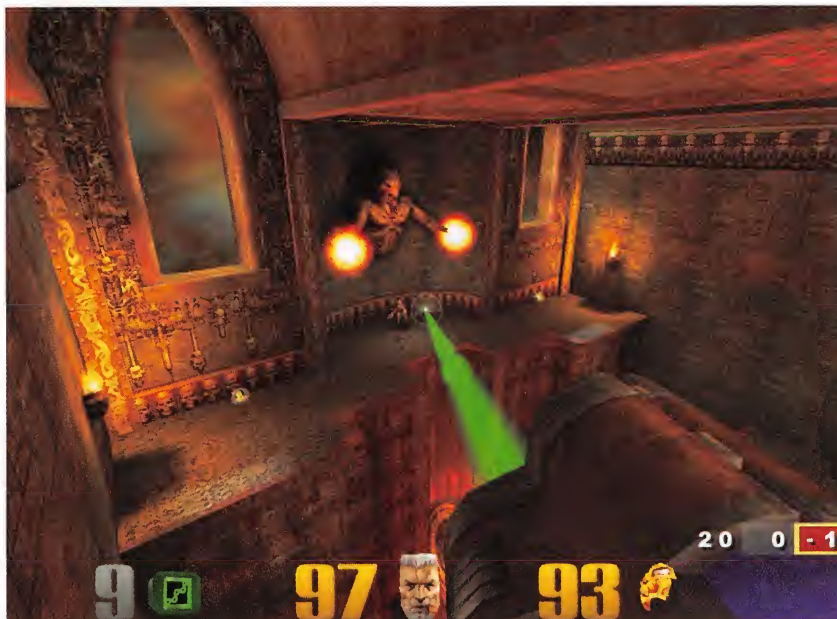
Q> I'm in the Lower Ward and I know I need to get inside the Siege Tower for the Godsmen quest but I can't figure out how. I've tried killing everyone around it and that didn't help. Can you help, please oh please?

Jacinta Holly, ACT

A> If you've ventured this far in the city of the doors, then you should realise that needless killing rarely give any insights. Rather, go into the marketplace and talk to young Lazlo, a ne'er-do-well if ever I saw one. He will provide you with the necessary information. The wonders of the Siege Tower are now yours to behold.

Quake III

Q> Please tell me if there are any secrets throughout Quake III Arena, like secret



doors or levels, all that funny stuff. Scratch ya later,

Daniel Brewster, VIC

A> Scratching me is one thing you certainly shan't be doing, later or ever. Most of the secrets of which you speak involve cheating - so naturally I can't help, you twit. Therefore I have only one easter egg I can share with you. In the Deva Station, there is a shotgun spawning location, with a teleporter in front of it. The wall behind the shotgun is a secret door. Frivolous indeed...

Grim Fandango

Q> I'm in the scary woods outside of El Marrow and I can't get past the ghost beavers. I've used the fire extinguisher on them, but they just run away and

come alight again by themselves. You are wise so how do I beat them?

Julie Spiteri, Email

A> Yes, I am wise - you are not. Ha ha ha! Yes, indeed. These demon beavers are attracted to bones, aren't they? So take some bones and go down to the left of the dam, to the shore if you will. You may have noticed that by throwing bones into the river, the beavers will jump in after them. Here is where the trick comes in. You need to use the fire extinguisher as the beaver jumps in. This will put them out for good. So, so very wise, am I!

Beavis & Butthead Do U

Q> I've been playing this game for ages and I'm stuck. I have a question

that desperately needs answering. Where and how do I get change for the washing machine and drink dispenser?

Dud Camelrabbit, Email

A> So you need to collect some funds. Your old fellow Van Driessen is the key to money problems. Go to the Java 101 and click on the coffee machine, thereby turning Beavis into the infamous Cornholio. While the woman behind the counter is distracted pick up the tip jar. Take it outside to your buddy Van Driessen. Use the tip jar and the blind concert ticket on Van Driessen and make him wear the glasses. Sympathy is a wonderful thing and you will make some money.

CODE Star Trek Armada

During gameplay hit Enter and type in the following codes to enable the corresponding cheats:

CANOFWHOOPASS

99 more officers

SHOWMETHEMONEY

more money

SCREWYOUUGUYSIMGOI

NGHOME

multiplayer boot list

PHONEHOME

multiplayer chat list

KOBAYASHIMARU

skip mission

Messiah

Hit the Esc key and enter the following codes to enable the corresponding cheats:

UCANTKILLME

God mode on (Bob only)

FLESHNBLOOD

God mode off

ILLBEBACK

weapon ammo

TOOHARDFORME

end game

ICANTSEE

AI vision off

ICANSEEU

AI vision on

BRAINDEAD

AI off

EINSTEIN

AI on

FREEZECAM

Freeze Camera

THAWCAM

Thaw Camera

BIGBANG

spawn bazooka

BUZZBUZZ

spawn buzz saw

LIGHTMEUP

spawn flamethrower

GETSOME

spawn grenades

STICKAROUND

spawn harpoon gun

RAPIDFIRE

spawn machine gun

SLICENDICE

spawn Maimer

COOLOFF

spawn Pak Gun

BOOMSTICK

spawn Pumpgun

WELDME

spawn welding torch



HARDWARE HAPPENINGS

TECHNEWS

SILICON STATE OF THE ART WITH **HUGH NORTON-SMITH**

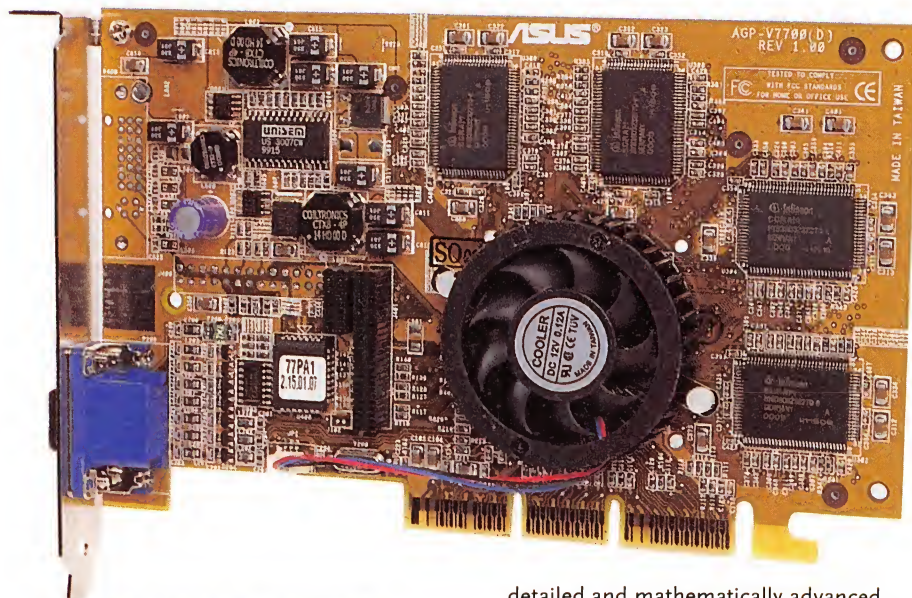
THE GEFORCE 2 IS HERE AT LAST

HUGH NORTON-SMITH EXAMINES THE FIRST-GEN OF THE NEXT-GEN

Nvidia GeForce 256 made its debut back in November 1999. With an integrated Transform and Lighting engine, the GeForce 256 was a truly revolutionary design. The blazingly fast performance and innovative design have ensured Nvidia's dominance in a cutthroat marketplace. In line with their 6-month product cycle, the GeForce 2 GTS is Nvidia's latest offering and the successor to the GeForce 256. But is it a worthy heir to the current 3D graphics champ? Read on.

EVOLUTION

The GeForce 2 GTS is an evolutionary product, rather than revolutionary; indeed, it features a very similar architecture to the original GeForce 256. However, some of the chip is new. Importantly, both the rendering and T&L engines have received major optimisations and other performance enhancements. GTS stands for 'GigaTexel Shader' - a gigatexel is one billion filtered textured pixels. The GeForce 2 GTS can pump out a sustained rate of approximately 1.6Billion texels/sec, which is roughly three times more than the GeForce 256. To put this into perspective, consider that, even without T&L support, the GeForce 2 GTS is significantly faster than any of its competitors. This includes the belated Voodoo 5 5500. The impressive speed of the GTS was largely achieved by the transition to a low-power .18micron design process. As you may know, using a smaller process can allow for higher speeds due to the greatly reduced operating temperature. Naturally, the reduced power consumption makes the GeForce2 GTS infinitely more stable than its power-hungry brethren. At a lower micron size, Nvidia are now able to run the GTS at 200Mhz, in contrast to 125Mhz on the GeForce 256. However, the overall speed increase is not the only improvement found in the GTS.



NATURAL REALISM

By doubling the texels/clock ration from 4 up to 8, Nvidia were able to effectively double the fill rate of the GeForce 2 GTS. Disregarding inherent memory issues (discussed later!), the revamped 8-way rendering pipeline makes the GTS a veritable polygon-pushing monster. The term 'Shader' indicates an important addition to the Transform and Lighting (T&L) engine. Nvidia have included a per-pixel shading and lighting engine into the GeForce core. The integrated Nvidia Shading Rasterizer (NSR) is responsible for carrying out these tasks. The NSR is radically new technology, which allows the GTS to apply advanced lighting effects to seven pixels simultaneously. As the name implies, per-pixel effects allow the GTS to apply advanced lighting on a pixel-by-pixel basis. Essentially, this allows for greater accuracy and realism - it's particularly useful when depicting natural environmental effects, such as fur, glass, metal or any other highly

detailed and mathematically advanced surface. Basically, per-pixel shading will make 3D elements look and behave like their real-life counterparts - wood will seem 'grainy', glass will refract light, and waves will roll convincingly into ripples. The complexity of these calculations has meant that, up until now, Per-Pixel shading has not been a viable option for home computers. Expect Per-Pixel shading to become de rigueur for next years games. In fact, John Carmack, code-chimp at id Software, has, somewhat cryptically, stated, "per-pixel shading that uses cube environment mapping normalized dot product bump maps looks incredibly good across an entire world. Everyone at id is incredibly psyched about developing new content with the GeForce 2 GTS."

DOUBLE THE FUN

Like the GeForce 256, the GeForce 2 GTS, supports a frame buffer of up to 128Mb. However, don't expect the 128Mb variants to arrive anytime soon. Besides the prohibitive

QUICKBYTES

QUAKE 3 BENCHMARKS

Quaver Level, using Pentium III 600, 256Mb RAM

1024x768x32Bpp
V7700 - 74 fps
V6600 - 54 fps

1280x1024x32Bpp
V7700 - 48fps
V6600 - 30fps

1600x1200x32Bpp
V7700 - 32fps
V6600 - 21fps

Quaver is a particularly stressful, texture intensive benchmarking demo. It can be downloaded from www.voodooextreme.com/reverend



The new GeForce2 will assist your Quake3 performance no end.



cost of so much DDRAM, a 128Mb version would show zero performance benefits in the current generation of games. DirectX texture compression makes a 128Mb card virtually redundant. A 128Mb model would only appeal to graphics professionals and 3D Studio Max gurus. The first batch of cards will feature 32Mb of DDRAM, which, coupled with texture compression, is more than enough to rip through even the most texture intensive Quake3 levels. Nevertheless, if you are keen to play Quake 3 at 1600x1200x32Bpp or higher, the 64Mb version is worth investing

in. Interestingly, unlike the GeForce 256, the GTS will only be available using DDR (double data rate) memory. DDR memory is significantly faster than SDR (single data rate), allowing for significantly higher memory throughput - it would have been a shame to see the GTS crippled by the inferior transfer rates of SDR memory. In fact, even with the added bandwidth of DDR memory, the GTS is still somewhat restrained.

With the latest batch of drivers (5.22), the GeForce2 now supports Full Screen Anti-Aliasing (FSAA). Also known as Super

Sampling, FSAA eliminates the ubiquitous jagged edges that are so prominent in games. Although the Nvidia implementation is considerably slower than the 3dfx version featured on the Voodoo5, games look markedly better with FSAA turned on. Remember, that in order to harness the brute power of the GeForce 2 GTS, especially running FSAA, you will require a suitably beefy CPU. We recommend an AMD Athlon, or a Pentium III 600 and above to make the purchase worthwhile. ■

ASUS

GEFORCE 2 GTS AGP-V7700

RRP: \$690 DISTRIBUTOR: CASSA AUSTRALIA

Almost every PC component manufacturer has announced some form of product based around the GeForce 2 GTS. Despite the competition, Asus are the first manufacturer to release a card here in the Antipodes. Asus are an established Taiwanese motherboard manufacturer, with an increasingly important multimedia division: their TNT and GeForce 256 products have proved to be some of the most feature-rich and inexpensive options on the market.

Although the card closely follows Nvidia's reference design, it does incorporate a few notable differences. Most importantly, the inclusion of Smart Doctor™ technology allows for dynamic overclocking, fan RPM monitoring, AGP power level monitoring and overheat protection. For frantic hardware tweekers, the addition of the embedded

Winbond hardware-monitoring chip on the videocard is a boon. So far, Asus are the only company to implement this feature. Like all Asus cards, we get the obligatory bundle of mediocre software. This includes AsusDVD, a competent software DVD decoder, Drakkan,

Rollcage and a game Demo disc. Sadly, none of these games are going to harness anywhere near the full potential of the GTS.

As with any GeForce 2 GTS card, the V7700 is faster than Speedy Gonzalez on a Ritalin/Tequila cocktail. As you'll notice from the benchmarks, the V7700 really begins to show its muscles at higher resolutions, where it totally blitzes the competition. Under Quake3, the GTS chipset is unbeatable. Like all next-generation videocards, the 2D performance is impressive, even at 1600x1200. In sum, despite the cost, the GeForce 2 GTS makes a compelling upgrade, particularly for TNT2 or Voodoo3 owners. GeForce256 owners, on the other hand, might want to wait a bit longer.

Hugh Norton-Smith



PC POWERPLAY BUYER'S GUIDE FULL-TOWER CASES

Cases are perhaps the most frequently overlooked components in any system purchase. Unlike most parts of your computer, a computer case is a long-term investment. Over time, a good case can house many systems. Don't let the price intimidate you: there are a variety of compelling reasons for purchasing a snazzy full-tower case. Most importantly, you want your rig lookin' goood! If you're fed up with the usual beige metal box, several manufacturers now offer clear, design-conscious cases inspired (!) by the Apple iMac. Although aesthetics are important, don't spurn functionality in favour of looks (sounds like my girlfriend!).

In fact, the move to a full-tower case can reap significant rewards, besides the obvious pose factor:

SPACE

Obviously, a larger case will allow you to keep more in - this includes extra hard disks, a CD burner or even an oversized dual CPU motherboard. In addition, if you spend a lot of time tweaking your computer components, you will really appreciate the extra real estate. Large cases are a much easier environment to work in, particularly when installing fiddly computer components.

COOLING

Cooling is another important reason. Keeping your PC chilly is very important for system stability. It is also crucial when attempting to overclock any item within the PC. A larger case will invariably allow for better air-flow. Overclockers swear by bigger cases,

particularly when stuffed with cabling, high-performance videocards and toasty 7,200RPM SCSI hard disks.

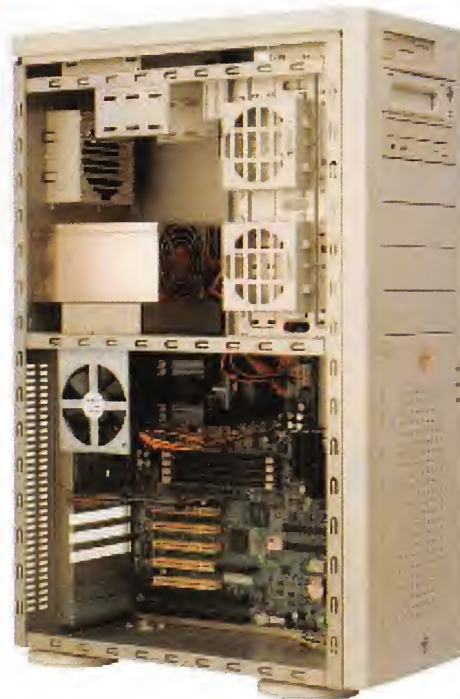
Look for a case with air intakes at the top and bottom. Also, make sure that the case comes fitted with several fans for air circulation. If not, you can buy these later from the computer store. Whilst all internal Power Supply Units have their own fans, this is usually not powerful enough to provide decent cooling. Ultimately, you really want a case that acts as a sort of wind tunnel, channelling the warm air out of the back of the case. You know you have done well when your case begins to sound like an F-15 taking-off!

POWER

Generally, a full-tower case will feature a maximum 300/400W-power supply. Besides allowing you to attach more devices, a large power supply provides a cleaner electrical current. When you're running sensitive items such as a CPU or videocard, a reliable power supply is important for system stability. As an example, the AMD Athlon CPU has stability issues when coupled with standard 230W power supplies. So, when purchasing a new case, aim for the biggest power supply unit you can reasonably afford. When you factor in a CD burner, a couple of hard disks, a power-hungry CPU (or two!) and a high-end videocard, only the

larger units will work properly. We recommend either a 300 or 400W PSU. Also, make sure that the PSU has sufficient power leads. Although you can buy Y-cable splitters later, many systems come with an inadequate supply of power hook-ups. ■

Hugh Norton-Smith



QUICKBYTES

CASE JARGON

AT: Obsolete form factor, although generally still supported in never ATX cases.

ATX: ATX 2.01 is an industry wide case specification, that improves upon AT in many ways. It features a more efficient layout, a better mounting mechanism and colour-coded installation routines.

Tower Case: A computer housing where the system is mounted vertically. The tower case is the most popular form factor, as it allows for the most efficient cooling.

Desktop Case: The Desktop computer casing lets users place the computer on their desk, and place their monitors above.

Although it is a convenient design, the desktop chassis eschews cooling and layout, by placing the motherboard in a horizontal position.

UPS: A UPS (Uninterruptible Power Supply) is a device that allows our computer to keep running for at least a short time after the power is lost. IT includes a battery, which is activated when the external power source fails.

Redundant Power Supply: If one power supply fails, the second (redundant) power supply will kick in. While costly, almost all servers and mission-critical computers will come with a redundant power supply.

MODIFIED CASES HOT LINKS

www.niako.net

Designer cases, a la iMac

www.aopen.com.tw/products/housing/default.htm

High quality Aopen cases

www.supermicro.com

Purveyors of the world's finest cases!

www.hardocp.com

Features amazing DIY case modifications, including the "Blow-Hole"!

PC GAMEGUIDE

There's developers all across the

world working hard every day and night



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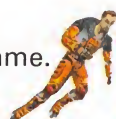


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You'll find more than your average walkthroughs in PC GameGuide -

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ARCADE



NINTENDO 64

ASUS AGP-V6600 PRO 64 GeForce2 GTS

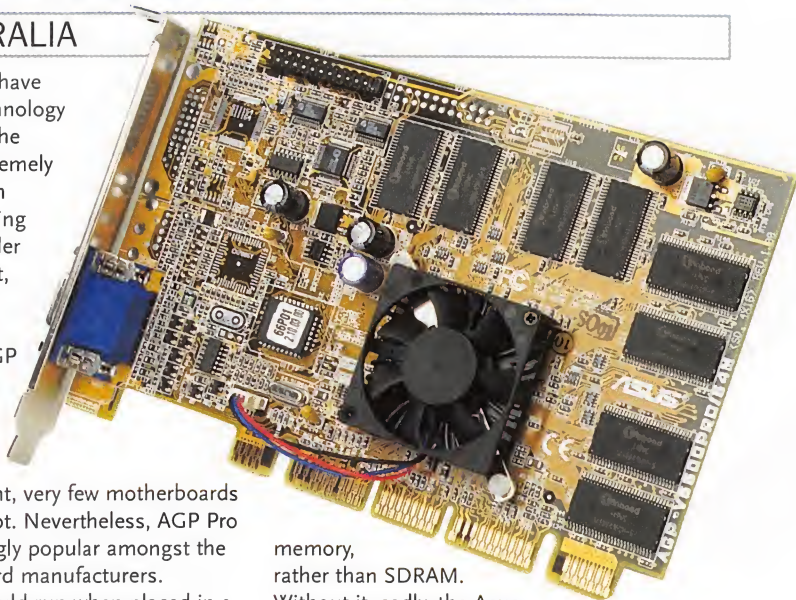
RRP: \$499 DISTRIBUTOR: CASSA AUSTRALIA

With the release of the GeForce 2 GTS, the GeForce256 has become increasingly affordable. Moreover, despite the arrival of the updated chipset, the GeForce 256 remains a highly competent solution. For all but the most competitive gamers, the GeForce 256 remains one of the most attractive options.

As with every other Asus card, including the V7700, the V6600 Pro features Smart Doctor technology. However, the most exciting feature of the V6600 PRO 64 is the inclusion of a whopping 64Mb of memory - more memory than most PCs had a year ago! As well as impressing your girlfriend (trust me!), the extra memory is important for storing textures locally, rather than using the AGP bus. As games become increasingly texture-heavy, the extra memory will be enormously useful. Unfortunately, Asus skimped, and shipped the V6600 with Single Data Rate (SDR) memory. The use of this antiquated memory technology seriously limits the speed of the V6600; the slow frame buffer negates many of the benefits of 64Mb of local memory.

Also of note, Asus have included AGP Pro technology with the V6600 Pro. The GeForce 256 is an extremely power-hungry chip - an insufficient or fluctuating power supply can hinder system stability. In fact, power issues plagued many first-generation GeForce 256 users. AGP Pro puts an end to this, by ensuring that the chip receives a clean, powerful current. At the moment, very few motherboards feature an AGP Pro slot. Nevertheless, AGP Pro is becoming increasingly popular amongst the Taiwanese motherboard manufacturers. Although the card should run when placed in a standard AGP slot, AGP Pro will ensure that sufficient power is delivered to the card.

The V6600 would have been a significantly more exciting product had it included DDR



memory, rather than SDRAM. Without it, sadly, the Asus V6600 is a rather lacklustre product, best suited to the undiscerning or casual gamer.

Hugh Norton-Smith

SIROCCO Crossfire Speakers

RRP: \$899 DISTRIBUTOR: VIDEOLOGIC

A few years back, a CD-Rom drive and two dinky speakers were enough to earn a computer the hot 'multimedia' label.

Fortunately, the industry has grown since then. Decent speakers have become one of the most important items in any respectable PC system - Indeed, what's the point in having a \$200 PCI soundcard without a pair of quality speakers to wreck your relationship with the neighbours?

Importantly, the Sirocco Crossfire speakers were designed from the ground up for the PC. It's a true 4.1 solution, with a chunky amp, four magnetically shielded satellite speakers and a hefty bass-bin. To give you an idea, the sub woofer is about the size of a full tower case. Visually, the jet-black unit has a professional and functional design, mercifully devoid of faux-wood panelling. It all feels very solid and well constructed. Audax, one of the most respected players in the Hi-Fi community, are behind the speaker design. Audiophiles will know that Audax are a subsidiary of Harmon-Kardon. Consequently, the sound quality of the Crossfire speakers is worthy of a true Hi-Fi system. Even at high volumes, the subwoofer delivers punchy, undistorted bass. Similarly, the satellites produce an ultra-responsive mid-range and treble. The vocal clarity of the satellites was remarkable, with equally



impressive stereo imaging.

In sum, if you're even slightly interested in PC-DVD, MP3 or 3D sound, the Sirocco Crossfire is worth investigating.

Hugh Norton-Smith

CORRECTION

In #49 we incorrectly stated that Creative Pacific were the distributors of the Sound Blaster Live! Platinum and the Cambridge Soundworks FPS1000 Speakers. In actual fact, Creative Labs Pty Ltd handle all Creative Labs product here in Australia, and they can be reached at (02) 9666 6100.

SONIC VORTEX

Breaking their allegiance to ESS technologies, Videologic have integrated the Aureal Vortex 2 processor into their latest soundcard. In fact, the SonicVortex2 is dangerously similar to the Aureal reference design. The only feature that separates it from the likes of the Diamond Monster MX300 and the Turtle Beach Montego was the addition of an S/PDIF optical output connector without the need for an additional daughter board. This is particularly useful for those of you interested in digital recording directly to Minidisc or DAT. You can also use the S/PDIF connector for home cinema system.

Although it's getting old, the Vortex 2 remains an impressive audio solution. With full support for A3D 3.0 and Microsoft's DirectSound, this is the ultimate chipset for 3D audio aficionados. A3D 3.0's 'wavetracing' allows designers to easily add occlusion and reflection effects to games - And it sounds particularly impressive when coupled to a 4-speaker set-up like the aforementioned Sirocco Crossfire speakers.

SONY G500 Monitor

RRP: \$2699 DISTRIBUTOR: SONY

A new monitor is one of the most important additions to any ninja gaming rig. Regardless of your videocard or CPU, games will still look shit if you're running them on a 14" Fishbowl monitor. For any self-respecting gamer, a decent monitor is a must: indeed, if you're going to spend numerous hours a day in front of your monitor, you'll want the largest size possible. Monitors are also one of the most costly peripherals available, and the Sony G500 is no exception. Effectively, you could buy a completely new computer system with the money spent on the G500. Thankfully, a decent monitor is an almost future-proof investment; unlike most computer components, it doesn't demand a bi-annual upgrade.

As Sony's flagship model, the G500 boasts some impressive features. As with all of the G-Series, the G500 features a true flat screen. In fact, it is so flat that during the first few hours of use, it will give you the impression of being almost concave. A flat surface is important: besides giving a geometrically perfect rendering of the scene, it also minimises outside glare.

The high resolution FD Trinitron CRT - with a 0.24MM aperture grill - delivers superior image quality at insanely high refresh rates. Moreover, unlike most 21" monitors, the G500 will operate at a staggeringly high resolution of 2048x1536. Naturally, the G500 is a superb high-end Windows monitor; if you're interested in CAD, graphic design or 3D animation, the G500 is ideal. However, although designed for the graphics professional, the G500 is also the most impressive gaming monitor I have ever used.

Although the screen is absolutely massive, the G500 has a very compact footprint that's only slightly larger than most 17" monitors. Unlike some of the gargantuan 21" monitors on the market, the G500 takes up a minimum of desk real estate.



If you can afford it, I have no reservations in thoroughly recommending this behemoth of a monitor. After all, you get what you pay for! However, if you are not prepared to shell out for the G500, Sony's 19" G400 is also worth considering.

Hugh Norton-Smith



THE BEAST

AN ULTIMATE RIG **BY HUGH NORTON-SMITH**

CPU: Dual Pentium III 933 EB SMP

The 1GHz Pentium III processors are almost impossible to find. They are also insanely expensive (even for the God box), and require elaborate cooling to remain stable. The Pentium III 933 offers similar performance, at a much more reasonable price. With two of these babies, you'll thrash any single processor system in Quake3. When the Athlon goes dual, we'll give it consideration!

Motherboard: SuperMicro P6DBE

One of the few motherboards that supports dual Pentium III 'Coppermine' processors, and up to 1GB of RAM! Designed as a server motherboard, the SuperMicro P6DBE is renowned for its stability.

RAM: 256 MB KingMaxx TinyBGA PC133 SDRAM

256MB should keep your computer satisfied for some time. You'll also be able to do some serious multitasking! The PC133 standard is critical for a system that is based on a 133MHz Front Side Bus.

Hard Drive: Quantum Fireball 28GB CM

Unlike the KX, the Quantum CM has an impressive 2 MB cache. It also features the ATA/66 interface, and a spindle speed of 7,200RPM.

Videocard: Asus V6800 Deluxe

Although it only (!) has 32MB of DDR texture memory, the V6800 Deluxe has the most complete feature set of any videocard. This includes TV-In/Out, as well as 3D glasses and a DVD software decoder.

Soundcard: Creative Labs Sound Blaster Live! Platinum

The SB Live! Platinum package includes the highly successful SB Live! Card, as well as the Live Drive II optical interface and a massive software package.

Monitor: Sony G500 21" Trinitron

Able to pull off 2048x1536, this'll impress the mates. Particularly when coupled with a capable videocard like the Asus V6800.

The Beast represents what the PC PowerPlay crew recommends you buy if money were no obstacle. In short, the most nitro-burning, hard-rocking computer system this side of a Silicon Graphics Onyx2 RealityMonster. (Yes, it does exist!)

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS SETUP



HARDWARE 101. WITH **DANIEL RUTTER.**

WRITE TO:

Setup
PC PowerPlay
PO BOX 634
Strawberry Hills
NSW 2016
setup@pcpowerplay.next.com.au

When you write remember to include as much pertinent information as possible. Send your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT and any associated *.INI files for Windows that might tell me more about your problem. Give me as detailed an explanation as you can and be sure to include as much detail as possible about your PC. Feel free to email your questions or, if you want to snail mail, please remember to write clearly or better still print your letters. Please note that due to the volume of messages we receive, we cannot guarantee a response to your queries.

GIGA... BITES?

Q> I have a 440LX motherboard made by Gigabyte. I was wondering what type of RAM my motherboard can take? I would also like to know what kinds of AGP cards I could put on my motherboard.

Kyle Katarn, Email

A> Gigabyte made eight LX boards. They all support ordinary 3.3 volt SDRAM DIMMs, such as you can buy in any computer store at the moment. You can use PC133 DIMMs if you like, but your board won't support Front Side Bus speeds above 100MHz, so you don't need to. The price difference between plain PC100 and PC133 modules is small, so it doesn't matter much.

The board'll work with any AGP video card it can power. But odds are it can't power a newer card.

Versions of the 440LX chipset before v1.1 had... issues... regarding the 3.3 volt AGP line, which could be fixed with some motherboard soldering. Later versions didn't have this problem. But most (all?) LX boards (and a lot of BX boards, as well) have a low-cost linear regulator for AGP power, which can't deliver enough current to run various recent video cards - Voodoo 3s, TNT2s and GeForce, and so on. Gigabyte's offerings aren't ESPECIALLY bad, but I still don't like your chances.

IGNIDARGPU

Q> I would just like to say you have the best games mag out. I was wondering - if I was to upgrade from Windows 98 to 95, would I have to reformat my drive to FAT16 from FAT32?

James Paussa, Email

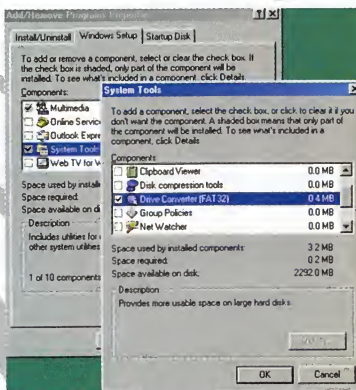
A> OK, so you're from the backwards alternate universe where Spock has a beard, right?

Or maybe you're not, and you meant to ask about upgrading from 95 to 98, and converting from FAT16 to FAT32.

FAT16 is also known as just plain FAT. It's the not-very-good filesystem forced on us by MS-DOS and all versions of Windows until the second release of 95, which was subtitled

"OSR2". FAT32, the newer version, lets you use partitions bigger than two gigabytes, and wastes a lot less space. It is A Good Thing. Well, at least in comparison with FAT16.

You'll be pleased to know that one of Win98's standard utilities is a "Drive Converter" that lets you change FAT16 drives to the newer format on the fly, without losing data (well, unless you lose power in the middle of the conversion...). You'll end up with a quite fragmented drive - this is one of the few situations when defragmenting your hard drive may actually make a significant performance difference - but you won't have to reformat.



The bigger the FAT, the better.

If you neglected to install the converter when you install Win98, go to Control Panel -> Add/Remove Programs -> Window Setup -> System Tools to add it.

CYRIX VERSUS CELERON?

Q> In issue 48, PC Powerplay spoke of the new Cyrix CPU, the Cyrix III, and said it was outperformed by even lowly processors, making it a bad choice for gamers.

I believe that not to be true, as with the advent of video cards with their own geometry engines the Cyrix will replace the Celeron as the budget gamers' CPU.

Why is that, you ask? Because you have always said the Cyrix is as fast as a Pentium except for FPU performance. Since the video cards like the GeForce 256 can do their own FPU stuff, there

would be no performance hit in using a Cyrix chip. So in effect a 500MHz Cyrix chip costing a fraction of the price of a Pentium III would give comparable or even the same performance as the Intel chip when running a GeForce 256 card.

Please correct me if I'm wrong. Though from these facts it should it should make you think twice about disregarding the Cyrix as a gamer's CPU.

Another quick question. My motherboard has USB hardware in it, but I don't have any USB ports in my computer. If I were to buy the Microsoft keyboard with USB ports, can I use those ports, or do I need to buy a card of some sort to get it working?

Thach Nguyen

A> Your CPU idea is an excellent one, sir, with only two small drawbacks. One, no graphics card actually does take the load off the FPU, and two, no graphics card actually does take the load off the FPU. I realise that technically speaking that's only one drawback, but it's such a big one I thought it was worth mentioning twice.

What the GeForce and GeForce 2 actually do is move transform and lighting tasks onto the graphics card. This does, indeed, reduce the load on the FPU - but it certainly doesn't eliminate it, because the FPU still has to calculate its little socks off to come up with the basic geometry in the first place. The basic geometry, which involves figuring out where all of the polygons are, is still done by the CPU; a GeForce just helps out when it comes to figuring out how the abstract 3D world maps into the 2D picture on the monitor, and what all of that disco-ish illumination does to things.

A CPU with a weak FPU will do better with a GeForce than it will with a theoretical identical graphics card WITHOUT hardware transform and lighting. But it'll still be slow.

And, as I write this, the fastest III that VIA Cyrix has released runs at only 400MHz. Oh, they "rate" it as a "500", but even if you charitably say that it's got straight-up, honest to goodness 500MHz P-II performance, that still means that it's only as fast as a 500MHz Celeron, which'll probably

LETTER OF THE MONTH

CPU SHOOTOUT

Q> I am planning on buying a new CPU and motherboard but am facing a serious problem, which no-one seems to know the answer to. Is the Athlon better than the PIII? Everyone, your mag included, seems to favour the Athlon (which does look very nice) but yet there is no real explanation why. Is the Athlon better than the Coppermine PIIIs?

I have also heard that Athlons do not access their onboard cache as fast as the PIII's do? Is this really that important?

Basically if I want good 2D and 3D gaming and it is a choice between a PIII and an Athlon, which should I buy? And why?

Sunchild, Email

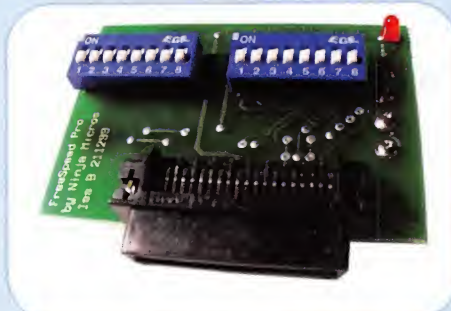
A> If you don't intend to overclock, Athlons are much better value than PIIIs. The slower Athlons are faster, at a given clock speed, than the slower PIIIs; as you get up past 700MHz the Athlon loses its speed advantage compared to an equivalently clocked P-III. This is because the Athlons have half-speed Level 2 (L2) cache, just like every Pentium II and Pentium III (but not Celerons) before the current "Coppermine" PIIIs. Half-speed L2 cache runs at half of the processor core speed; it has to, because the little RAM chips can't go faster.

However at higher core speeds, the Athlon cache RAM can't work at even HALF of the core speed; it has to be clocked further down. 750 to 850MHz Athlons have cache that runs at 2/5 of the core speed; 900 to 1000MHz Athlons clock the cache at only 1/3. The result is that the faster Athlons pretty much level-peg with the faster PIIIs, but the slower Athlons outperform PIIIs with the same clock speed.

The speed difference isn't huge, in any case; the price difference is much more significant. As I write this, a 700MHz Athlon sells for \$595, and a 700MHz P-III (which is, as I mentioned, a bit slower) is \$790.

If you intend to overclock, then you can wind up PIIIs by just increasing the Front Side Bus setting (on motherboards that support it), and maybe also increasing the processor core

voltage a bit. With Coppermine PIIIs, you often don't even need a big CPU cooler.



Overclocking Athlons requires you to pop the plastic part of the processor cartridge off, and plug a little third-party circuit board (like the Ninja Micro FreeSpeed Pro shown above) into the connector thus revealed. Then you can set the processor multiplier - which is a better way to overclock than by changing FSB - and voltage. You'll need a decent CPU cooler, though; Athlons run hotter than old model PIIIs, and MUCH hotter than Coppermine PIIIs.

You can also get decent Athlon coolers quite cheaply... like these...



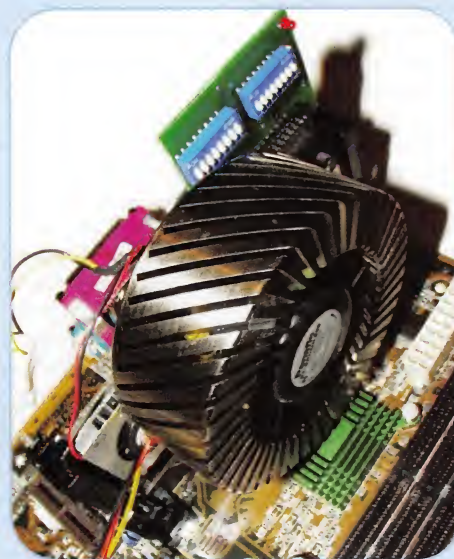
...but the more STYLISH ones, like the huge



LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS THE MOST EXCELLENT SIDEWINDER AND DUAL STRIKE CONTROL PADS FROM MICROSOFT'S PREMIERE RANGE OF GAME CONTROLLERS. CHEERS MICROSOFT!

Alpha P7125 and very-hard-to-find retrofitted Hewlett-Packard TurboCoolers pictured below (by the time you read this, www.montac.com may well have sold the last of them), take another chunk out of the money you save by getting an Athlon in the first place.

Then again, going with the fancy coolers... like this...



...DOES give you one bad-ass lookin' CPU for your money.

cost you little more than \$200 by the time you read this.

Given that the III only keeps up with Intel (and AMD, for that matter) chips for integer performance, and given that floating point performance still matters, I'd not be at all surprised if a "PR500" III doesn't give the overall 3D gaming grunt of a 450MHz K6-II, which by the time you read this will probably be about a \$100 chip.

In answer to your keyboard question - the Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro is a normal PS/2 keyboard (with knobs on, and extra buttons... don't ask me what I think of Swiss Army Keyboards...), but it also serves as a

two port USB hub. It's not magic, though; if you want to use its two USB ports, you have to plug a second cable



from the keyboard into a USB port on the computer. It's just like plugging in a stand-alone USB hub, or one of those monitors with USB ports included.

If your motherboard is USB capable,

as you say, then all you probably need is a cheap cable that plugs into the appropriate header on the board, and terminates in a couple of ports on a plate that screws into the back of your case. If you can't get the cable, or your motherboard's USB capabilities aren't all they might be, take heart. You can use a simple PCI USB port card (selling for \$70 or less) to give you a couple of root hub ports just as good as built-in ones.

Actually, some people who DO have built in ports have to use one of these cards, because their motherboard ports are based on dodgy hardware that doesn't work properly with some

TECH TIPS

SHIFTY

Someone who calls himself Private Private has kindly provided a list of things Shift does in Windows. Take it away, P-man...!

People are constantly pointing out that when you hold down Shift, CD Autorun doesn't happen, but Windows packs a whole range of shift tricks, including:

- Holding shift while deleting a file really deletes it, instead of just moving it to the recycle bin.
- Hold shift when you click OK to restart Windows, and Windows will do its fast-restart (which, by the way, can do odd things now and then, and is officially unsupported by Microsoft - Ed).
- Holding Shift until about two seconds after the startup splash screen appears prevents autoexec.bat and config.sys from loading, and Windows starts in Safe Mode.
- Holding Shift when you're logging in stops the programs in your Startup folder from being loaded.
- Holding Shift when you're dragging something forces it to be moved, if it would otherwise be copied.
- Holding Shift when closing a folder window causes the parent folder window to be closed, and its parent, and so on as long as the chain remains unbroken.
- Holding Shift while opening a program causes the program to open minimised.

peripherals, like USB printers.

4X WORTH IT?

Q> I am running a Celeron 466 with 96MB RAM, an 8GB hard drive and a TNT 2 Ultra. My motherboard only supports 2x AGP, while my TNT2 will support 4x AGP. If I were to change to a motherboard with 4X AGP, how would this translate in frames per second in a game like Quake 3?

Chris A., Email

A> The performance difference you'd see would be, to use a technical term, three-fifths of bugger all.

The reason why is simple enough.

AGP's purpose in life is to give video hardware really fast access to main memory. The older PCI bus, running at thirty-three and a third megahertz and moving 32 bits per clock cycle, cannot possibly shift more than 127.2 megabytes per second. Because there's lots of hardware fighting over the PCI bus, and because there's lots of overhead in many of the transactions performed, the real bandwidth available to PCI devices for any given task - like reading gobs of texture data from main memory - is much smaller.

AGP, on the other hand, has twice as much bandwidth as PCI, even if you're only using the original AGP 1X speed. AGP simply runs at twice the clock speed. 2X and 4X AGP run at the same clock speed as 1X, but transfer two or four blocks of 32 bits of data per clock cycle. So 1X, 2X and 4X AGP are good for more than 250, more than 500 and more than 1000 megabytes per second of theoretical bandwidth.

Again, there's lots of limitations that mean real bandwidth doesn't meet that theoretical specification, but since there's just the one peripheral on the AGP bus, there's not nearly as much overhead as there is with PCI.

So 4X is twice as fast as 2X, then, right? Wrong!

AGP can't transfer any more data to your video card than the computer can provide. When you're just dealing with textures coming from system RAM, the system RAM speed is what matters. The memory bus width in current PCs is 64 bits (eight bytes), so you multiply the speed of the RAM by eight to get the number of bytes it can shift per second.

Your 466MHz Celeron is running from a 66MHz Front Side Bus. The FSB speed in that computer is, unless you're using one of those odd VIA

boards with the independently clocked RAM, the same as the memory speed. At 66MHz, your total, maximum, absolute redline RAM bandwidth is 533 million bytes, which is 506.8 megabytes, per second. So if the RAM has absolutely nothing to do but send data to a video card, and has no overhead problems, it can just about feed a 2X AGP card.

Since the RAM actually has LOTS of other devices to deal with, and there's TONS of overhead that means your real RAM bandwidth is generally little better than half of the theoretical maximum, you'll actually be lucky if 2X AGP is a whole lot faster than 1X.

Even 133MHz FSB systems - running late model P-IIIs, or overclocked to that high a bus speed - only have enough real bandwidth to properly feed a 2X card. 4X is still well over the top. You'll see some performance benefit from 4X on a 133MHz FSB machine, but not a lot; on a 100MHz machine the benefit will be even smaller, and on your 66MHz machine it'll probably not even be measurable.

There's still no substitute for lots of on-card video memory - and texture compression, too. Then the graphics card can hold enough texture data that it seldom needs to hit main memory. When more geometry tasks get done by video cards, and so greater amounts of data need to be pumped to the card just to draw things with textures it's already got, then super-fast graphics card buses may help more. At the moment, though, a given card with a crummy old PCI interface is likely to be embarrassingly close in performance to a rip-snorting AGP 4X version of the same thing, all other things being equal.

POP MUSIC!

Q> Why is it that when I plug anything into a power point or turn something off, my speakers pop? Is it stuffing them up? Perhaps there is some type of shielding that I could use? Please help, it's so bad that I can tell when someone is using the microwave and for how long!

Eloise, Email

A> Somewhere in the signal path to your speakers is something that's poorly shielded against radio frequency (RF) noise, which is emitted by anything that creates a little spark. It's probably the speakers themselves that are the culprit, if they're the usual ultra-cheap plastic weeny-boxes that

plug into most computers.

Don't sweat it, though; unless your speakers are turned up all the way so the poor little voice coils smack the cone as far as they can when the things pop, no harm will be done.

Which is good, because there's pretty much nothing you can do to shield the speakers against the noise. Higher quality speakers have much less interference-prone circuitry.

EWV! BRAND NAME COMPUTERS!

Q> I am a prospective computer buyer and I am wondering what you think of Dell. I am looking at buying a PIII 733 with 128Mb RDRAM, 20GB HD and a 32MB NVIDIA GeForce graphics chip. What do think of this computer?

I have another query for you - are there any other meanings for DVD besides Digital Video Disc?

Brendan Hughes, Email

A> Dell make OK computers, I suppose. But all brand name computers are substantially more expensive than the same thing bought from a decent clone maker, and commonly cut corners - the default hard drive in more-than-\$4000 Dell boxes is, as I write this, still a not-so-fast 5400RPM 5.25 inch Quantum Bigfoot, for Pete's sake.

A P-III 733 is a nice speedy machine. Why you want RDRAM, though, beats me. It's spectacularly expensive, and machines that use it are only marginally faster - if at all - than machines that don't.

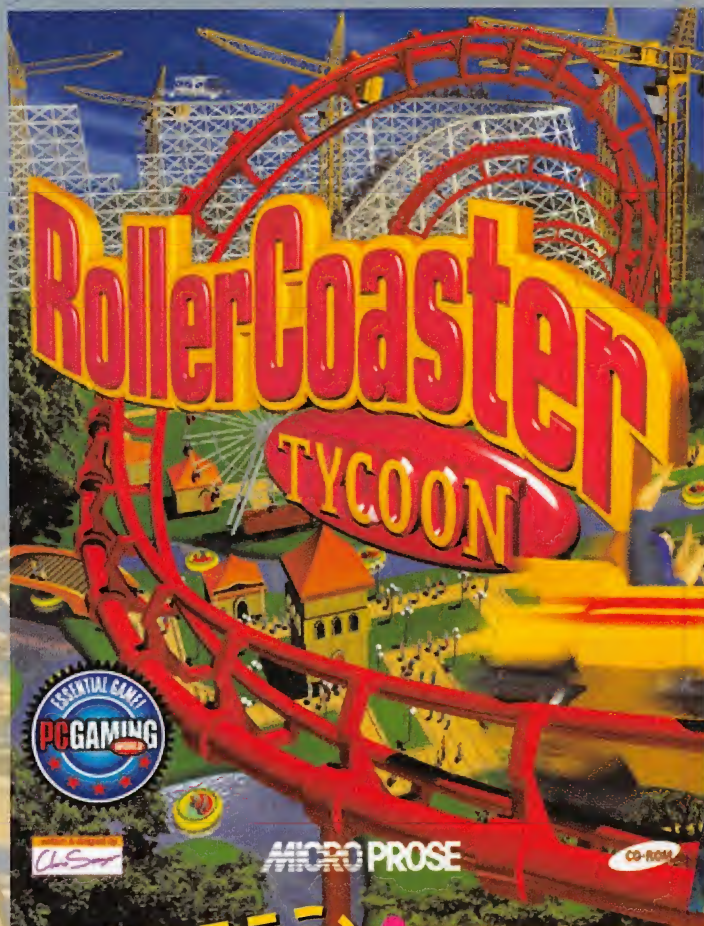
A computer with a VIA Apollo Pro 133A-based motherboard, instead of the Intel i820-chipset board in that Dell, will accept the exact same processor and graphics card and give you pretty much the exact same performance.

As I write this, quality 128Mb PC-133 SDRAM modules cost less than \$300. 128Mb RDRAM modules cost well over \$800.

The machine you specify will, as I write this, set you back more than \$4,400 for the whole enchilada, including monitor and Windows and so on. Go to a good non-brand-name assembler and you can get a machine just as fast for easily \$1000 less. Maybe \$1500.

The idea is that you get better support with a brand name machine. You may or may not ACTUALLY do better, of course; many no-name clone makers also provide excellent support.

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CD POWERPLAY #51

Starting CD PowerPlay

Welcome to the latest edition of CD PowerPlay. This month's discs include some of the hottest demos from around the world. Highlight of this month's selection is Ground Control - true 3D strategy gaming is finally here. We've also collected together some movies of the year's best games - check out Commandos 2! As always, navigation through the online menus is easy. Simply click on the category you want and then select the game or utility. We hope you enjoy this month's CD and hope to see you back next month for another dose of gaming goodness.

cdtech@powerplay.next.com.au

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DISC 1



Ground Control

Category: Realtime Strategy

Developer: Sierra

Need: P200, 32MB, SVGA, 3D Card

3D: Direct 3D

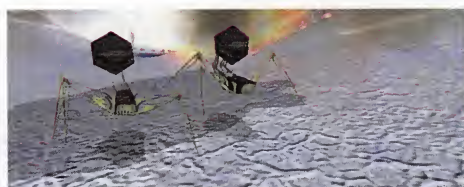
Multiplayer: N/A

■ Ground Control is a realtime action and strategy game concerning two political factions which have gone to war over a distant world.

By combining strategic combat with fast-paced 3D action elements, Ground Control delivers a fresh experience that appeals to a wide audience, including online gaming enthusiasts. At its core, Ground Control is a frenetically-paced, real-time simulator played out in a visually stunning 3D world. During the course of the game, you will be challenged in an intense arena of battle, managing tactical squads of foot soldiers, mobile units, aircraft, and support units as they vie for control of a distant planet.

Command your squads in a variety of formations, across rugged terrain, and to victory in several different mission objectives. Ground Control eliminates many of the tedious aspects of typical games and focuses its gameplay on tactics, strategy, and the art of battle. There are numerous types of tanks, hover bikes, airplanes, and soldiers that will be at your disposal. Once you are in battle you won't be able to bring in reinforcements, so proper troop selection will be key to success. Each unit type has special weapons, abilities, and armour that you can custom fit to each unit. Or let the game auto-select the proper load for each mission. Advanced artificial intelligence makes your troops and your enemy's troops act and fight realistically, meanwhile, a free-floating camera allows you to zoom in and out and view the action from any angle.

*This demo allows you to play a limited amount of missions.



Die Hard Trilogy 2

Category: 3D Action

Developer: Fox Interactive

Need: P200, 32MB, SVGA 2MB

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: N/A

■ In Vegas, the odds are against John McClane. But then again, they always are. Blast into non-stop action as feature film and game hero John McClane, who once again finds the chips stacked against him as he faces a new legion of hi-tech terrorists in a race against time. The bright

lights and vast landscape of Las Vegas provide the backdrop for an all-new story line that incorporates the three white-knuckle game styles of the original best-selling Die Hard Trilogy. Try to beat the odds as you match wits with the meanest, smartest villains in the most explosive adventure John McClane has ever faced. The payoff is the hottest action in town!

Match wits with enemies that survey their surroundings, listen, watch, then pursue with

deadly purpose. Strategy is the key; use your wits to control the action. Gain access to restricted areas, save the hostages, and solve complex puzzles. Enemies have five damage quadrants so make your aim count because one shot may not be enough. Yippie-kie-yay!

*This demo allows you to play a limited amount of the 3rd person adventure, sharpshooter, and extreme driving modes.

Tachyon: The Fringe

Category: Space Sim

Developer: Novalogic

Need: P200, 32MB, SVGA

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX

■ Tachyon: The Fringe is an intense space-combat adventure of colonising the vast regions of territory on the fringes of space.

The Sol Government has declared that it does not officially recognize the Bora colony's claim on several sectors of fringe space. Bora colonists left the solar system over one hundred years ago to create an independent settlement. In an act of defiance to the government at the time, it did not obtain a proper charter for far space colonisation. Recently, several legitimate corporations have expressed interest in obtaining claim rights to various sectors of fringe space, including those inhabited by Bora. Representatives from Bora responded by asking the Sol government to



Lemmings Revolution

Category: Puzzle

Developer: Talon Soft

Need: P2-266, 64MB, SVGA 2MB

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: N/A

■ The most recent addition to the Lemmings lineage, Lemmings Revolution brings the challenge of a simple but elegant 3-dimensional environment to the addictive strategy & puzzle game of rescuing the Lemmings from certain doom. Lemmings, if you don't know by now, are cute and adorable creatures that lack any sense of self-protection. They'll gladly bump into walls and walk off cliffs if you don't stop them, so you need to protect them from themselves and guide them gently towards a waiting hot air balloon.

*This demo allows you to play a limited amount of levels.



Gunship!

Category: Flight Sim

Developer: Hasbro Interactive

Need: P2-266, 32MB, SVGA 2MB

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX, Modem

■ Russian nationalism is back with a vengeance. From the ashes of economic despair the Old Russian Bear creeps back into the heart of the former Soviet territories faster than a heat-seeking missile. Eastern Europe has become the flashpoint for WWII. Russian forces amassed on one side, NATO on the other. You're about to deploy the most devastating weapon in the inventory of war: the helicopter gunship. You must blend finesse, raw power, stealth, and speed in a high-wire balancing act of exact proportions. In 21st century war, the fate of the world can turn on one micro-engagement in the epicentre of the action. Fly low and strike deep!

Taste the action from both sides in the U.S., British, German, and Russian gunships. Fly the AH-64D Apache, Westland Apache, Eurocopter Tiger and Mil-28 Havoc. Rolling terrain provides for intense low altitude action: take cover behind trees, hills and ridges. Mobilise in two hard-hitting modes: Instant-Action Target-Rich onslaught or Active World Campaign System overrun with military ground units. Stunning graphics generate unlimited battles and monstrous multi-player missions. Gunship! gives you all the white-knuckle crises of combat deployment that can only be found in WWII.

*This demo allows you to fly an action mission or the Men of Harlech simulation mission.



officially grant its claim. After several months of deliberations, the Sol government decided to refuse Bora's legitimacy, leading to a rush for colonisation in the newly opened edges of space. Tachyon features a free form mission structure, furious space fighter warfare, innovative new weapons, and the most incredible large-scale objects ever seen in a space game. You play one of the best mercenary space-pilots in the Sol system, Jake Logan, featuring Bruce Campbell

as the voice of your character. Tachyon features a two-sided storyline that allows you to join as either a part of GalSpan Mega-Corporation or one of the Bora Rebel Settlers. *This demo allows you to play the first five missions.

MDK 2

Category: Action

Developer: Interplay

Need: P200, 32MB, SVGA, 3D Card

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: N/A

■ It's all about earning



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03

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Warlords Battlecry

Category: Realtime Strategy

Developer: SSI

Need: P200, 64MB, SVGA

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX

■ The inhabitants of the Isle of Dawn are threatened. Their fate rests in your hands. Set out on a journey of good or evil as you set out to destroy the Two Tears. Fail in your quest, and the Two Tears will wreak havoc upon the land, causing much bloodshed and mayhem. Are you prepared to meet the challenge of this ultimate adventure?

Realtime strategy had no room for heroics... until now. The question is, will you be the hero of your race, or just another soldier in the field? Warlords Battlecry takes realtime strategy gameplay into the next generation with hero-based gameplay. Create a hero in one of nine races and then take him and his armies through campaigns, quests and multiplayer games. The nine races include: humans, dwarfs, orcs, minotaurs, undead, high elf, dark elf, wood elf, and barbarian.

Your hero and his armies must set out, on either a path of good or a path of evil, to destroy the Two Tears (two powerful and mystical meteorites) before they fall into the wrong hands. As you win scenarios, campaigns, or multiplayer games and your hero gains experience, he will be able to choose a specialty class that will strengthen his attributes. The four broad classes include warrior, priest, rogue, and wizard.

*This demo allows you to play a scenario against up to three opponents.

bragging rights as you make your way through the ranks from Greenhorn novice to Master Hunter. Hone your hunting skills as you go in pursuit of North America's most popular game deer, EA SPORTS, second foray into the hunting landscape is Ultimate Hunt Challenge, a premium hunting simulation that boasts the

most realistic graphics and animal AI, the richest, largest 3D worlds, and the best gameplay of ANY hunting game!

Dogs Of War

Category: Realtime Strategy

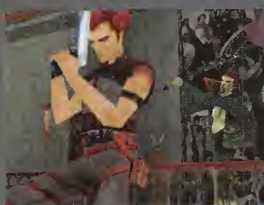
Developer: Talonsoft

Need: P2-266, 32MB, SVGA

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: TCP/IP, IPX

■ The year is 2161. Earth has colonised Primus IV to exploit the rich deposits of a new element, named SL18. After some skirmishing with scattered indigenous life forms, the



Devil Inside

Category: Action/Adventure

Developer: Cyro Interactive

Need: P2-233, 32MB, SVGA 2MB

3D: Direct 3D

Multiplayer: N/A

■ Los Angeles, beginning of the 21st century: Dave Ackland, a former cop turned journalist, now carries out his investigations for the local TV channel specialising in the weird and bizarre. But Dave is no ordinary person, he has a strange and unusual power - he can change into his delectable female double, the devilish Deva, a leather-clad devil with supernatural powers.

On the evening of Halloween, Dave enters into a haunted house where heinous crimes have been committed. He will have to fight against the living dead that now possess this building to solve the crimes and lay the evil to rest once and for all. Meanwhile back at the studio, the host of the show, Jack T. Ripper, begins the live coverage, following Dave and Deva's every move, in front of a studio audience that is increasingly eager to see the macabre. This evening will be the highest rating the show has seen... but at what cost? Devil Inside... to achieve the highest ratings, some people will go to Hell and back!

*This demo allows you to play a small section of the game.



Dogs Of War



colonists take hold of Primus IV and begin mining SL18. Fast forward 40 years ... the colonists have been consistently used and maltreated by Earth, as SL18 turned out to be a valuable military-grade material. Using their newfound wealth from controlling the only known supply of SL18 in known space, the colonists of Primus IV declare their independence from Earth, hiring an elite mercenary force named the

WarMonkeys for the assault they know will come from Earth.

*This demo allows you to play a limited campaign.

Virtual Skipper

Category: Sailing Sim

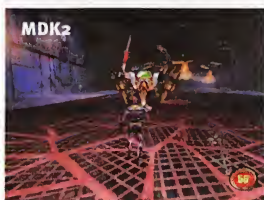
Developer: Duron

Need: P90, 32MB, SVGA

3D: Direct 3D, Glide, 3DFX

Multiplayer: IPX, TCP/IP

■ Hey, why not become a virtual sailor? There doesn't seem to be many every-day leisure activities that can't be enjoyed via your PC these days, and sailing the open seas in a boat you can't possibly imagine really owning is another one. So, Virtual Sailor is a accurate-feeling simulation of an open-sail race - players start off by plotting their path on a map, then racing against a handful of computer controlled entrants. A helpful autopilot option is at hand so you can just put your feet up and smell the sea air if that's your idea of a good time.



DISC 2

MOVIES FROM E3

■ Want to see what the year's best games will look like - and, more importantly, what they will play like? Check out our movie special, featuring nineteen awesome rolling demos.

Movie Drivers

- Quicktime
- Indeo
- Microsoft Windows Media Player

**Baldur's Gate 2**

The sequel to 1999's best selling PC game.

**Commandos 2**

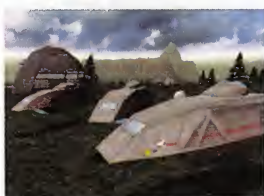
You too will say, "Ja! Das ist gut!"

**Deus Ex**

Meet the new firstperson action hero.

**Empire Earth**

See how war has evolved throughout the ages.

**Star Trek: New Worlds**

Ready an away team for ground-based combat.

**Grand Prix 3**

This could be the greatest racing game ever.

**Ground Control**

Watch the movie, then play the demo.

**Halo**

Cutscenes or gameplay? Decide for yourself.

**Homeworld: Cataclysm**

In space no one can hear you gasp in awe.

**Warcraft3**

The orcs and humans return to the ring.

UTILITIES

Bulletproof

With Bullet Proof FTP, interrupted file transfers are easy to resume. Should you encounter a disconnection when downloading files, Bullet Proof FTP will automatically reconnect and resume downloading. Features include automatic disconnection after downloading files, a queue that supports drag and drop, and a tray icon that displays the progress of file transfers.

ICQ 2000

ICQ 2000 is the latest release of ICQ ("I seek you"), the popular instant messaging program that lets you communicate with friends and colleagues in real time. This major update lets you get a glimpse of where the popular instant messenger is heading, such as being more firewall-friendly, containing enhanced privacy features, a few cool tweaks and an easier interface.

Winzip 8

WinZip is a straightforward, fast, and easy-to-use zipping and unzipping utility that includes built-in support for popular Internet file formats such as TAR, ZIP, UUencode, XXencode, BinHex, MIME, and Unix-compressed files. Older ARC, ARJ, and LZH files are supported via external programs. This latest

release comes with many great features including the ability to create archives that span multiple floppies (in case you need to zip a huge file), builds self-extracting archives so that recipients without a zipper can decompress the files, as well as offering optional password-protection for archives.

Winboost 2000

WinBoost 2000 is a special utility to configure and personalize Windows 98/98SE/95 looks and feels. Using easy to use graphical user interface you can configure hundreds of Windows 98/95 hidden settings, from the Start Menu, Desktop, Accessories, Windows Explorer, to Internet Explorer. This is something that you cannot do on the regular operations. In addition, you will get hundreds of selected Windows 98/95 Tips & Tricks to boost your Windows performance.

mIRC 5.7

mIRC is a configurable IRC client that has an intuitive user interface, an events handler, and full send and receive capabilities for DCC (direct client connection) files. It also has color text, aliases, remote commands, backgrounds option, and sound. It automatically opens Web sites as they are mentioned in a conversation, ignore DCC Sends that match specified filenames or

types, and lock the program to disable various features.

PS2 Rate

PS2Rate allows you to take greater control over your mouse. This simple 112k download can configure the PS/2 mouse sampling rate on Windows. If you occasionally feel like exterminating your mouse because of its low response time, stop, because it could actually be your operating system. You could either go into your control panel settings to fool around with mouse movements or cut to the chase by using this program to simply arrange the amount of hertz. In just a couple of seconds you can boost the level of output and turn your mouse into a smooth operator.

Roger Wilco - Mark 1a

This first, official, nonbeta, nontest release of Roger Wilco presents a small, standalone application that allows you and your friends to talk to each other while playing multiplayer games online. It works with most existing games, such as Half-Life, Quake II, Diablo, Tribes, Unreal, and StarCraft, and will also work with other games that have multiplayer capabilities still in development. In addition to games, Roger Wilco will work with ICQ so that you can chat verbally with your nongamer friends.

**Icewind Dale**

Classic dungeoneering hack 'n' slash action.

**I-War 2**

The sequel to the best intro movie ever.

**Klingon Academy**

Star Trek-flavoured space combat. Plus nebula fx!

**MDK2**

Much Deviant Killing. Or something like that.

**Sacrifice**

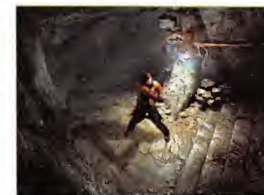
Shiny's stunning serving of strategy.

**Neverwinter Nights**

Witness the revolution in online roleplaying.

**Oni**

All the moves from your favourite manga flick.

**Alone in the Dark**

The grandfather of survival horror returns.

**Giants**

The weirdest but funkiest action game of the year.

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IN-BOX

Letters Tip #11 We've always found that using commas instead of fullstops leads to endless confusion.
WRITE TO: PC PowerPlay Letters, Level 6, 418A Elizabeth St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010. letters@pcpowerplay.next.com.au

Hit on their hands

I have a problem with computer game magazines. The focus always seems to be on the publisher of a game and not the developers. I hate to see a write up that says "Microsoft has a hit on their hands here". Hello! They didn't write the game, they just distribute it. It's like admitting that the advertising, money and hype is more important than the game.

I know magazines like yours have a very chummy relationship with the publishing

companies. They supply you with the games to review, promotional material for competitions and your free lunches. But perhaps we could give the developers more credit.

I'd like to see mention of the company who developed the game. Then I'd like to know the top programmer, designer and artist involved. Perhaps something that mentions the most successful previous game that person worked on. Since staff changes in development companies are common I would not mind a developer page that shows what

Byte Size

I am not saying that Chrono Trigger is the best RPG ever.

Jay Ledger

And why the hell not?

is going on, and which of the "star" development people is where and working on what. And how about some profiles and interviews?

It will take more journalistic effort from PowerPlay staff, but you are just the sort of quality magazine to pull it off making reviews more interesting and accurate.

ABCGi Yahoo!

It's a tragedy that 99.9% of the talented people behind the games we love are ignored by the majority of the games press. Perhaps we've been guilty of the same in the past, but you can be rest assured that we do make every effort to give credit where it's deserved.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Bitten by the PC

Having a second cover-to-cover read of PCPP#49 was definitely worth it. On reading the review of Starlancer for the second time it became very clear to me where firstperson space combat games are going at present - absolutely nowhere! Perhaps the Homeworld experience for me might be a part answer to this belief.

Spurred on by the unfortunate pasting given to fellow readers Sergei and Ewan on p124, I began to chuckle when I glanced across the magazine to p125 and read:

"Starlancer, the latest game from hot studio Digital Anvil, combines the intense action of first person combat with the drama and intrigue of a classic WWII air combat movie."

Having bought the game prior to this second reading I thought perhaps the caption should have read:

"Wing Commander 17 - Starlancer, the latest game from the not so dull Roberts brothers combines the well beaten path of scripted near linear gameplay with fantastic enduring epic cutscene movies."

Don't get me wrong, my sons love it and I am proud to be their discerning purchasing officer. But that is where the lie is - I selfishly bought it for ME.

I became hooked on the concept of space combat sims many years ago when I bought my first PC game, Privateer 2. I believe one of the abovementioned Roberts brothers had a lot to do with this game and good on him. When I read the recent review of Starlancer I thought that the idea of space combat in our own solar system was a brilliant idea and my fond memories of playing P2 were rekindled. Pity though in Starlancer those beautifully rendered planets which are our celestial neighbours are still no more than an artistic unreachable backdrop. At least in P2 the player could feel free to navigate to any planet in that cunning fictitious solar system and fight and trade their way through the game with minimal but important movie intervention. In fact, I think



because P2 might have been so ahead of its time for this genre, future releases of space combat sims for me became very disappointing. Not so for my boys, thankfully.

Arcade is really what I am getting to. Arcade space combat denies the player real space. Hence, a game such as Descent Freespace is a contradiction in terms. Compare this to flight sims like Falcon 4.0, Jane's FA/18 Hornet and European Air War where the journey through space and time with these products always FEELS REAL.

Now, go back to Starlancer and attempt to navigate to the solar side of Neptune - not possible. Instead, you are forced to comply with the game's linear direction. The journey does not feel real. In fact, it doesn't even appear to have commenced at all. I feel like I'm playing in a virtual small box, not the grandeur of our solar system.

Maybe, one day I will be able to make the choice of navigating near the 3D rings of Saturn, or take the risk of traversing too close to the deadly gravity pull of Jupiter after embarking on a mission from the orbiting path of Europa. Then, in space, I will be back to where the PC magic first began for me: Privateer 2.

Perhaps Freelancer? Hmm. - "Open the pod bay doors HAL." ... I can't do that Dave..."

Stephen Clarkson

Perhaps Freelancer, indeed...

Kindly forwarded

What gives? Here I am, in Detroit for work, suffering extreme withdrawal symptoms due to being 8000 miles away from both my gaming PC and my PC PowerPlay subscription, not to mention my copy of Homeworld! (I'm sure my fiancé back in Brisbane would have a few choice words to say on my list of priorities...)

Then, just when a couple of mags arrive in the post (kindly forwarded at my employer's expense!), I see that you've gone and got a nice new web site, which explains why Hyperactive no longer displays the current cover of PC PowerPlay. But, to my horror, when I enter in the magic URL, I get the following message: HTTP Error 403 - Forbidden.

What does this mean? You enjoy torturing people, by promising them wonders, and then locking them out? Or is the PC PowerPlay site forbidden to the heathens from foreign lands? And if so, how does a true believer journey through the chaos get their dose of gaming sanity in a timely fashion?

Bernard Walsh

For sending the wittiest and most polite correspondence we received regarding our beloved website, Bernard you deserve a reply. It's Internet Science, actually. See caption on opposite page.

Byte Size

Could you please tell me where I can get that pic of the babe in Linux gear on p126 (PCPP#49). I've been to hundreds of Linux websites tonight looking for her - my mouse hand is aching.

Rafae Stormborn

Are you sure that's why your hand is aching?

Byte Size

I heard about the L600 somewhere which I believe is a new gaming console.

1. Who is making the L600?
2. When is it going to be released?
3. And how does it compare to the upcoming X-Box?

Edwin Mayes

1. *Some boffin who has a beard, spectacles and emits a decidedly strange odour.*
2. *Two weeks!*
3. *To be honest, we do prefer the L600's fruitier head.*

Room with crap

Lately, it seems that PCPP has taken a turn for the worst. Come on guys! Music CDs? I think you may be forgetting the crucial "PC" in the title of your mag. And before you say it, yes I know music CDs can be played on computers! (So, your point is? - Ed)

DVDs? Fair enough I s'pose, but when you are complaining that the Score List is taking up too much room, and then go and fill that room with crap like DVD movies and music CDs, I hardly respect that view.

Which brings me to the next whinge. The Score List was fantastic. I used to be able to look in the latest PCPP for a review on a game a couple of years back that I wanted to re-read. Now the list is damn next to useless! Bring back the old List!

Finally, I nearly died when I opened the latest PCPP and saw that my fave bit, Read Error, was gone! Is this just temporary? Believe me, Tony the Reviewing Monkey is no substitute. Maybe if it was funny...

Milamber ConDoin

We're only doing this because you have such a great name - real or not. Next month's CD PowerPlay will contain the complete Score List from PCPP#1 to the present.

Burn N64 games

I have been wondering about this for a while and I just want to ask you simply why there is no TV advertising for PC games. Is it because you can't burn N64 games and PlayStation game piracy is very minimal? I mean it is possible to download N64 games off the internet and emulate them onto PC. PlayStation games can also be emulated onto PC. For example, the cinematic intro of Descent 3 on the Baldur's Gate CD is one of the most awesome examples of why it should be on TV than just on a demo CD or the BG CD. Is it again piracy that holds them back or is it just another one of those things the game developers/distributors are just too damn ignorant.

I'm sure cost is the main reason for this, but I'll just ask you pros as that's what you're here for. Tell me I'm right. It's piracy (the cost) that holds

PC games developers/distributors to advertise their awesome new games on free-to-air TV.

Josh Conno

It's Marketing Science, actually.

Take some off

Firstly, I'd like to say that your mag absolutely ROCKS! It's definitely the best on the Australian scene. (Er... the only one, surely? - Ed.)

You guys get heaps of games to review each month, and I was wondering what you do with them when you've finished. I mean, if you still keep them with you, I would be kind enough take some off your hands. I don't want you to be to burdened with too many games you know!

Andre Eliatamby

Thanks for your kind offer, Andre. Unfortunately, we like to save the games we review and use them to kindle the PCPP fireplace in those cold winter months. That's why we refer to our reviews as "Hot" on the cover each issue.

Please direct me

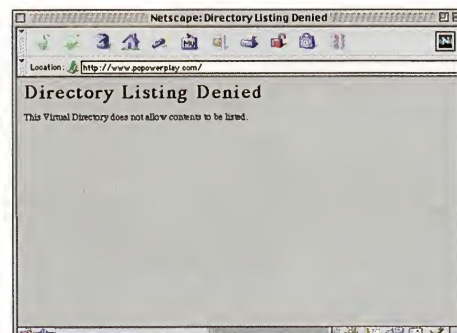
I am currently running a PII-350 MMX with an 8MB AGP 3D videocard and plenty of RAM. I would like to purchase either Half-Life or System Shock 2, but I can't decide which one. I want the game to scare the crap out of me, but I also want it to give me a run for my money. I've heard that System Shock 2 is better, but after Half-Life was voted Game of the Year (PCPP#47) I have had second thoughts. Please direct me to the game of my dreams.

Also do you think I should buy a 3D accelerator to boost my gaming experience or should wait for the new ones coming out and stick with my 8MB APG Video card.

Nick Tagliaferri

Half-Life received the PCPP Readers' Game of the Year award, while System Shock 2 earned the unofficial PCPP writers' game of the year. They're different games, of course - Half-Life is a brilliantly scripted, straight shooter, while Shock 2 is equally brilliantly scripted and adds a little roleplaying depth to the action. Either way you'll end up with one of the best games ever made.

A new videocard would be a good idea. Any TNT2 or Voodoo3 card will do the job and, right now, be priced very affordably, too.



Apologies to all those who have tried to access our website - www.pcpowerplay.com - in recent weeks. At the time of print we were assured by those responsible for designing and maintaining the site that it would be fully operational. Since then it's undergone several overhauls and alterations to ensure it's worthy of the PCPP name. We guarantee you, it will be when it's done...

Byte Size

I lost track of the job the game was asking of me and stared at the headless body on the ground.

Andrew Watson

And so the violence in videogames debate trundles along...

Cheap gaming system

With the release of the Dreamcast and the X-Box coming out, I just realised that every bloody time a new console comes out it's even more like a PC. For example, just about all the new consoles coming out (including Dreamcast) have internet capabilities. Now I figure that's okay because the ultimate gaming system has to have the internet.

But then they bring out a keyboard for the consoles. You might be thinking that's okay because consoles are still cheaper right? Wrong! If you have a look at how much the prices are going up eventually there will be no consoles only PCs (Or the other way round - Ed). So all of us people who want to buy a cheap gaming system (compared to a computer anyway) are pretty much screwed.

MoNkEy O' LuV

Are you reading the right magazine? Nice name, by the way. Altogether now: "Monkeys!"

Your bloody toaster

I am both sad and ashamed to say that I have noticed a change in the gaming industry. Consoles





► are becoming PCs. Ten more years of development and there won't be a difference. This occurred to me while I was flicking through the specs of the Dreamcast and found that it had online capabilities. Since then, the change has only blossomed with the X-Box having more standard computer components than console ones. It shouldn't be like this. (*Why?* - Ed.)

Consoles are made to plug into the TV - and Bob's your uncle, you're ready to play whatever cartridges you have. Not connect to your phone line, your computer and your bloody toaster! Companies are redefining and redesigning consoles to be like computers and it shouldn't be happening. (*But why?* - Ed.)

We should have seen it coming, however. As soon as console games came on CDs we should have recognised the danger (*Danger? What danger?* - Ed.). Why should it be that we should have to spend up to three grand on a top of the line system, just to have our neighbour go out and buy a new console for a couple of hundred, and be able to do everything we can do, with clearer graphics, more memory and a faster processor?

Cameron Austin

Well, the fact is that your neighbour can't do that. For the foreseeable future, the PC's versatility (i.e. not just playing games) will ensure its necessity. However, console developers are issuing a challenge to the way we think about these things. It will be interested to see how PC companies respond.

A warez download

I was ripped off by Maxis. Yes, I went out and purchased The Sims. I thought it would be good.

Byte Size

And how about a new feature in letters where people can send smart arse one liners. Call it something like "Byte Size".

Richard Lawrence

Thanks for your letter, Richard. It was too long to print, but oh how we laughed. You'll see the rest of it in PCPP#69...

I thought it was groundbreaking. But how wrong could I be? It's CRAP. Plain and simple. And now that you bunch have a little segment before reviews on what games you are playing, I'm quite shocked to see a number of you playing that abomination. May I highly recommend to all the readers that it isn't even worth a warez download. Nope, it's not.

Next, I was wondering where all the point and click adventure games were. I desperately need and want one. The last one I can think of was the Teletubby game. Are there any being made? Or is there a decline to move onto the same old FPS with the same weapons and graphics? Which leads me to another thing (*It scares me to think how your mind works* - Ed.). Why on earth did you put Rugby 2000 before Vampire: The Masquerade - Redemption? RUGBY IS CRAP. Vampire: The Masquerade, however, is sure to be a masterpiece.

Danny

To briefly address your three points:

1. You're wrong.
2. Funcom has found an Australian distributor for The Longest Journey and it will be released soon(-ish).
3. Because we wanted to.

And rather old

I got a few things to say about your magazine.

1) Your previews, get the dates right! An example is in PCPP#19: you guys said that Messiah was due to be release in 1997 June. But it was released in the year 2000!

2) In the previews section, how come you guys ALWAYS say that they are good? For example, in some issue, there was a preview for Darkstone, and you guys said, "There hasn't been many games inspired by Diablo's success, but strangely, this looks great!". But in the reviews, you gave it 60 something.

3) Your review scores are going down! In the early issues, nearly all the games you reviewed were over 75%, but now, average is something like 60%.

4) Who's the mysterious (and rather old) Oracle? We want name(s).

PC POWERPLAY WANTS YOU!

We know you like reading reviews, but have you ever written one?

We know you like playing games, but have you ever designed one?

If you answered yes to either of these questions, then we want to hear from you.

Reader Reviews

In an upcoming issue, PCPP will be launching a regular Reader Review page where each month one lucky (well, witty, literate and eloquent, too - but mostly lucky) reader will have his or her opinion broadcast to the world. Do you think that Over-hyped Blockbuster Game X is really a pile of tosh? Or is Obscure Little Niche Title Y actually a slice of genius? Maybe - heaven forbid - you just want to confirm that our review was spot on? All you need to do is send a 500 word review - remembering to fill out the score box and include a URL for the Extra box - of a relatively recent release game to: reader_review@pcpowerplay.next.com.au

Reader CD

Also, in the future, every edition of CD PowerPlay will come complete with a selection of the best maps, levels, mods and skins, all supplied by our most talented readers. So if you've ever built a level for Unreal Tournament, designed a mission for Thief II, or planned a map for Age of Kings, send it to us so that all our readers can share in your creation. Skins for Quake 3, wallpaper for The Sims, even an entire Total Conversion for Half-Life - it doesn't matter what as long as you think it might be of interest to your fellow readers. If it's good then it'll be welcomed on our cover discs.

Files of less than 1MB can be sent to reader_cd@pcpowerplay.next.com.au, while anything larger should be zipped onto a cd or floppy disk and posted to:

**Reader CD, PC PowerPlay, Level 6 418A
Elizabeth St, Surry Hills 2010**

- 5) Why did the Oracle stop giving out cheats?
- 6) Can you email competition answers?

Yoon Kim

1. It's not our fault.
2. It's not our fault.
3. It's not our fault.
4. It's not... er, sorry, who?
5. He never gave them in the first place.
6. Yes, but you won't win.

Byte Size

In my limited vocabulary I have but two words to say in response to your concerns: Deus Ex.

N[o]/_D[is]l[id]@(\)/u\$

We agree with whatsisname.

COMPETITIONS

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - REDEMPTION

THREE PRIZE PACKS TO WIN!



Activision and Nihilistic Software's Transylvanian action roleplaying game is about to leap from the shadows and sink its blood-stained and yellowed teeth into gamers everywhere. And, of



course, all you pale, innocent virgins out there would just love to be a part of the horror. As such, Activision has kindly donated three Vampire prize packs for us to give away to a trio of our most delectably porcelain-skinned readers.



EACH PACK INCLUDES:

*THE GAME!

A copy of Vampire: The Masquerade - Redemption. The chilling adventures of Count Christof Romauld, based on the White Wolf roleplaying rules system

*THE SOUNDTRACK!

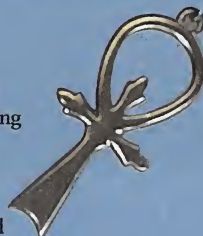
A copy of the game's soundtrack on CD, featuring the soothing sounds of Ministry and Primus. It's "music to feed by", apparently. We're not sure if it's any good because we were too scared to listen to it.

*THE BOOK!

A copy of the novel "Vittorio: The Vampire" by incredibly famous author Anne Rice.

*THE ANKH!

A silver Vampire pendant to wear around your neck to ward off evil. Which should be quite handy while playing the game (not to mention listening to the soundtrack).



To enter, all you need to do is convince us that you're the next Edgar Allan Poe, HP Lovecraft, Anne Rice and Stephen King all rolled into one. You need to scare us, frighten us, and absolutely terrify us so much that we faint on the spot. And all in less than 50 words. The winning entries will be those that leave us with the most shivers running up our spine. Or unconscious.

Send your demonic, diabolic and devilish prose to:

Vampire Comp
PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick St.
Redfern NSW, 2016

Answer on the back of the envelope, please.

WHERE TO SEND

Write the answer, along with your name and address on the back of an envelope. Tip: Don't forget to put the competition name on the front of the envelope.

All entries close July 26th.

Send to:

Vampire Comp
PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick St.
Redfern NSW, 2016

ISSUE 49 WINNERS

FORCE COMMANDER

Q: What is the name of the soon-to-be-released RTS game from the makers of BZ2?

A: Dark Reign 2

B. Woodbridge, Roby NSW

C. Blanch, Doonside NSW

S. Fell, Mooney Ponds VIC

I. Harris, Forbes Creek NSW

B. Gordon, Rosebud West VIC

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

Q: What is the name of the land where you adventure in Asheron's Call?

A: Dereth

J O'Brien, Myrtleford VIC

R. Shaw, Charters Towers QLD

J. Pace, Airport West VIC

W. Betts, Surrey Hills VIC

J. Campbell, Double Bay NSW

STARLANCER

Q: Which Nox culture lives in the north?

A: Neoromancers

D. Barnes, Lavington NSW

J. Benson, Whyalla Norrie SA

D. Foster, Jamboree Hgts QLD

S. Morrison, Hillsdale NSW

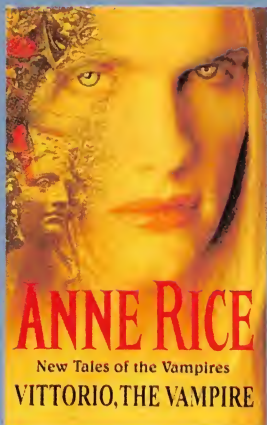
D. White, Asquith NSW

BEST OF RPG

R. McGregor, Keysborough VIC

BEST OF SIMS

T. Tozer, Hackham West SA



dvd

Mystery Men

PG, Columbia Tristar

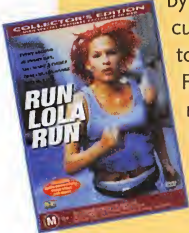
■ This comedy follows a group of not-so-super-heroes left to save a city after its Pepsi-endorsed lead crime-stopper is taken captive. It bombed at the box office, but deserved better. The great cast (Ben Stiller, William H. Macy and Geoffrey Rush to name but a few) really make this worth watching, but it could prove too silly or too long for some. Making-of doco, background notes and plenty of deleted scenes as bonuses.



Run Lola Run

M15+, Columbia Tristar

■ Lola's boyfriend is in serious trouble - he's lost his boss's cash and needs it back by noon, or it's curtains. So it's up to Lola (the fantastic Franka Potente) to raise the money, which involves a bit of running, as you can probably guess. This short (77 minutes) German film is a thrill ride of three alternate scenarios, with a driving soundtrack and music video stylings. Includes commentary, music clip and cast bios.



Alien Legacy

M15+, 20th Century Fox

■ Before purchasing the entire Alien box-set, it might be wise to ask a few questions. Can anything be as good as the original? After seeing it annually on TV (both regular and "sentry-gun" versions), can you sit through Aliens again? Alien 3 - good or bad because "not enough marines kicking asses"? How bad was the hybrid alien in Resurrection? Do you have enough time to watch ALL the extras?



Scooby Doo Mystery of the Fun Park Phantom

PUBLISHER: SOUTHPEAK INTERACTIVE
DISTRIBUTOR: UBI SOFT

■ Scooby Dooby Doo, where are you? Looking for trouble as always, with Fred, Daphne, Velma, Shaggy and the Mystery Machine. A phantom is scaring all the people away from the Gods' carnival, but the gang has a sneaking suspicion this ain't no spectre. Help the gang find out who the phantom really is and set a trap for him. Another choice

piece of entertainment for the kids, this is a straightforward no nonsense solve a mystery game, with great animated sequences, good cartoon graphics and real character voices. This package comes complete with the timeless catchphrase, "I would of got away with it too, if it wasn't for those meddlesome kids!"

Agata Budinska



Animaniacs Splat Ball

PUBLISHER: SOUTHPEAK INTERACTIVE
DISTRIBUTOR: UBI SOFT

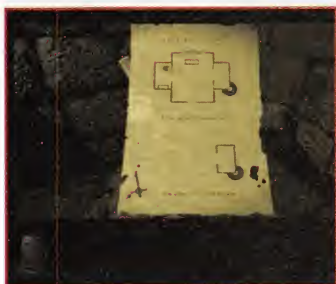
■ Yakko, Wakko and Dot are reeking havoc, yet again, around the Warner Brothers Lot. This time it's a match of Splat Ball against Ralph the Guard, Dr Scratchensniff and Thaddeus J. Plotz (otherwise known

as the Director). The objective is to be named Sultan of Splat Ball, a combination of skirmish and capture the flag, where you must defend your balloons while you try to capture theirs, all while you shoot paint at one another. Great cartoon graphics, especially when the characters are washing off paint



midgame, and a free flowing turn-based play mode make it a great game for parents who don't want their kids playing violent games, and kids who just want to shoot stuff.

Agata Budinska



The Crystal Key

PUBLISHER: CRYO
DISTRIBUTOR: HILAD

■ Yet another game that thinks if Myst can sell big, it can. A wafer thin plot of 'Save the planet from the evil-doer with the help of people who have already faced him' can't and won't save this game from the bargain bins' at your local K-Mart. This is weak, weak, weak. The interface is

annoying, it lacks the personality you want in an adventure type game, not much of a plot is revealed to you in the intro, not much to do except solve a few puzzles and look at the pretty pictures. Been there, done that. Next please?

Agata Budinska

Games we'd love to see on PC

No.4: F355 Ferrari Challenge (Arcade/DC/PS2)

■ The moment you climb into the cockpit of Sega's latest racing smash, you're hit with some divine realisation that you're in for something very special. The game itself is nothing truly spectacular; it's a Ferrari racing game, based on real live racing tracks from around the world (Monza remains a beginners favourite). Technically, the game is superb. Car detail is meticulous, the physics feel spot on, and the trees in the background look, well, like trees. Then why is this the most addictive racer we've played in aeons? Simple - it's all in the presentation. F355 Challenge features an incredible sensory package. Without a doubt, it's the use of three giant linked monitors. Smaller than the giant behemoths framing the latest Daytona adventure, the two peripheral widescreen monitors are placed on slight angles from the main screen, giving a never-before-seen field of view. But then, you can't forget the force-feedback steering wheel which offers serious resistance during tight manoeuvres. Perhaps it's the full stick-shift gearbox situated within the booth, allowing for completely masochistic control of the vehicle. No, it must be the massive subwoofer pumping out delicious engine noises that shakes which courses through every cell in your body. Yup, that's it. For a couple of minutes at a time, you feel like you're actually racing a highly tuned automobile. Of course, PC's racing elite already provides the back end for such an experience in the home. Until the peripheral toys become a heck of a lot cheaper and more effective (and we can afford three giant monitors), count us regulars at the local arcade.

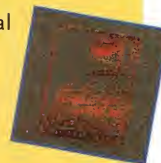


cd

A Silver Mt Zion

"He Has Left Us Alone..."
(Constellation)

■ In which several members of Godspeed You Black Emperor! employ violins, clarinets, guitars, and a piano in the creation of funeral marches for restless souls. The result is perversely both heart-wrenching and life-affirming.



Jeff Buckley

Mystery White Boy
(Columbia Records)

■ The second in a planned series of posthumous releases, Mystery White Boy documents Jeff Buckley's exploits as a travelling troubadour. A fascinating listen, this collection of live originals and covers highlights Buckley's penchant for exploration and improvisation. Don't forget the hanky.



Saint Etienne

Sound of Water
(Mantra)

■ Veteran English pop trio Saint Etienne - named after their favourite French football team - have been mining rich veins of classy, 60s flavoured dance beats for a decade now. This, their fifth album proper, finds them as sophisticated and aloof as ever. Indifference has never sounded so inviting.



url

www.pvponline.com

■ Player versus Player is a web comic strip by a nerdy PC gamer for you nerdy PC gamers out there. Included here are the immortal strips "Men are from Quake, Women are from Everquest" and explicit details on dating girls you meet in Arena. My personal favourite discusses the extreme dangers of overclocking your machine and killing people beneath you when you reach critical mass. All you sad lonely gamers out there will relate with ease to the shocking stereotypes portrayed. And, better yet, it just happens to be set at the offices of a PC gaming mag.



www.eruptor.com

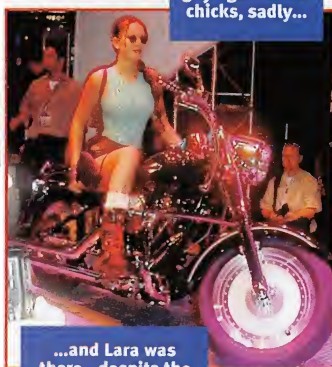
■ Got a system that can handle a bit of flash animation? Good, because you should go and have a look at Eruptor. Publisher of the Soul Reaver web comic, as well as brilliant animations like Jonni Nitro, Eruptor is one of the better examples of multimedia entertainment. And if that doesn't interest you, they've got the best marketing play ever: Women in tight tops in chatrooms.

www.portalofevil.com



■ If you are a little grown up, then come to the portal of evil. It hosts such magical sites as Fat Chick in Party Hats, Christian Love, and the fiendishly clever Seanbaby. Basically, this is the elite of terrible black humour, but nonetheless you have to see it. Seanbaby's superhero quiz page is probably the funniest thing I've ever seen in twenty-five years of web site review. Gamer Angst is truly worth your while.

Christian Read



E3 Soundbites

HERE'S A SAMPLE OF WHAT THE PCPP MINIDISC PICKED UP ON THE SHOW FLOOR.

- "We learned to beta test our games so that people could play them." The lesson Messiah has taught Dave Perry and Shiny.
- "No, we don't test for drugs, but you will be disqualified for using autofire." It's good to see the producers of the Sydney 2000 Olympics game have a sense of humour.
- "Oh look, he's starting to cry. I'd better smack him around a bit more." Parenting techniques courtesy of Peter Molyneux.
- "Mmm... Heh heh heh! We help each other." Gonzalo Suarez, of Commandos fame, describes Pyro Studios relationship with Eidos.
- "I want to be able to kill the dog of a small child..." Warren Spector outlines the degree of interaction in his ideal game.
- "Age of Empires II is like a sausage." Bruce Shelley struggles to master to appropriate metaphor for designing games.
- "I'd like to try your Purple Hooter." March's request at the bar of Universal City's Hard Rock Café.
- "No muffin could compare to Warren Spector." David discusses the highlights of the show over breakfast.
- "..." A surprisingly candid John Romero.

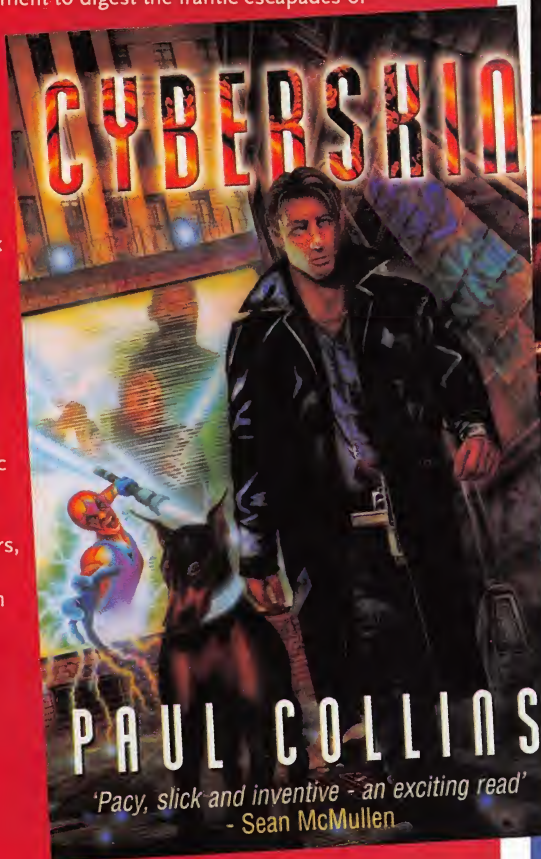
Cyberskin

BY PAUL COLLINS
(HYBRID PUBLISHERS)

"His blood pressure soars as he remembers the deaths a few years back from cyber-infection; the faces of the victims frozen with fear from encounters with phantasmal creatures. Some had bitten off their own tongues. The system is now supposedly fool-proof, especially since the advent of galvanic shut-down - a feature invented by his now estranged wife's company - which had restored buyer confidence and caused stock prices to, his own included, to quadruple."

Cyberskin sets a tremendous pace from the onset, giving only the occasional moment to digest the frantic escapades of

Calloway - snuff-film superstar - and the mysterious film company that has given his torrid life meaning. This is a colourful, exciting cyberpunk noir adventure - absorbing to the last. If you can keep up with the overuse of cyber-technobabble, Cyberskin will enthrall. A fantastic alternative to the American based cyber-fiction writers, given this title's obvious Australian bent.



So this is what game designers really look like... Ion Storm's Stevie "Killcreek" Case shows off her best side.

Thanks to Matrox's dualhead technology, games like Croteam's Serious Sam will allow two players to play side-by-side on two monitors. In a singleplayer game, you can use the second monitor to display maps.



TONY the Reviewing Monkey

IN "You've Got Mail!" (All correspondence is greatly appreciated) © J. Dewhurst 2000

An avid PCPP reader sends an e-mail to his heroes.



...such a low score. Apart from the inaccuracies in game details, the options DO allow you to....

The ever-diligent DAVID redirects all readers' comments to reviewers



None for Brett, none for Des, 20 for Tony... less than 1367 months at least....

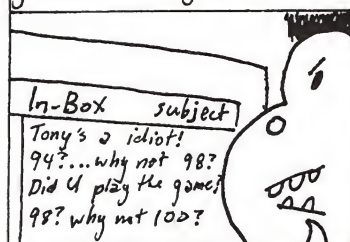
Tony cops the feedback

WHAT!? More critics?



Damn fools! Who do they think they ARE?

In the spirit of good journalism, Tony takes action!



DELETE-DELETE-DELETE- If I was a web crime-baron, I'd virus up these punks' P.C.s good!! Heavens to Betsy! END

Next month in
PCPowerPlay

THE TOP 100 GAMES OF ALL TIME REVEALED!

Return of the RPG...

COME FOR A TOUR AROUND
BLACK ISLE STUDIOS

- **Baldur's Gate 2**
- **Neverwinter Nights**
- **Icewind Dale**

and more!



Intergalactic!

GOING BOLDLY WHERE NO
SPACE SIM HAS GONE
BEFORE...


- **I-War 2**
- **Freelancer**
- **Bridge Commander**



PCPP #52 on sale July 26, 2000

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